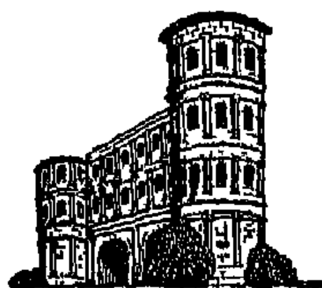
THE HUMANIST LIBRARY

THE MAHATMA and THE MISSIONARY

SELECTED WRITINGS OF

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI

Edited by Clifford Manshardt



HENRY REGNERY COMPANY
Chicago, Illinois
1949

Typography by Philip Reed

Manufactured in the United States of America
American Book-Stratford Press, Inc., New York

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book represent a systematization and condensation of a large number of articles by Mohandas K. Gandhi, dealing with the subjects of religion and missions, published originally in Young India and Harijan between the years 1924 and 1940, and collected and published in 1941, under the title, *Christian Missions, Their Place in India*, by the Navajivan Press, of Ahmedabad, India.

In their original form, many of the chapters are question and answer interviews, which has resulted in considerable repetition. Furthermore, no attempt was made to classify the materials according to subjects. The Indian edition is, however, an outstanding collection of source material on the thinking of one of the world's great spiritual leaders on one of the world's great spiritual problems: the interrelationships of religions.

It has been customary in missionary circles to publish books by Christian nationals under such titles as *India through Indian Eyes* or *China through Chinese Eyes*, which, though mildly critical in spots, were preponderantly apologies for Christian missions. It is unique and helpful for the Christian missionary enterprise to see itself through the eyes of a non-Chris-

tian friend of Christianity, and it should result in considerable searching of heart.

Not so many years ago the Christian missionary was practically the only American representative abroad. But today American commercial interests have penetrated into even more remote spots than American missionaries, while American commercial exports vie with our spiritual exports. It is obvious that all of these products do not receive an equal welcome in the Orient. Some are accepted whole-heartedly. Others encounter resistances of greater or lesser intensity. The Christian religion, as typified by its official representatives, is one product that meets varying degrees of resistance, because in the nature of the case, Christianity, as a religion with its own emotional attachments, is not going to displace other religions, with equally strong emotional attachments, without a struggle.

Every nation has its own culture—ideas, values, habits, customs, skills, traditions and institutions passed on from generation to generation. The individual to whom the Christian message is proclaimed is not a person in isolation. He is living within an environment that includes both his present and his past. A simple Indian villager, for example, may be influenced by his traditions, his caste, his religion, his occupation, his family, his neighbors, his village organization, the British Raj, Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress Party. To preach "Christ" without

taking these various factors into account, is not too productive.

The religions of the Orient, with which Christian missions come most in contact, have developed a certain unity through a long process of interrelatedness. Buddhism, for example, which arose in India as a protest against certain practices within Hinduism, is more influential in China, Japan, Korea, and Ceylon than in the land of its birth. Hinduism itself, overwhelmingly strong in India, is also very strong in Ceylon and the Malay Peninsula. Thus we have Hinduism and its offshoot, Buddhism, which is grounded in Hinduism, influencing a large part of the Orient. The Christian missionary who attempts to dismiss Hinduism, in its lower forms, as a religion of superstition and crass idolatry, and in its higher ranges as lost in the abstractions of an impractical philosophy, is simply revealing his own ignorance. Much of the life of the world has revolved on a Hindu axis. The real question is not the palatability of Hinduism to the Western mind, but the reason for its profound position of influence in the life of the East. Until the missionary knows—to use the language of the street—what makes Hinduism "click," he has no right to attempt to displace it. And what is true of Hinduism applies to other religions as well. Unfortunately, few in the missionary enterprise have possessed this knowledge.

The missionary must attempt to understand the origins of customs in the land to which he goes. How

did polygamy, polyandry, matriarchy, caste, child marriage, the joint family, or any other custom come into being? What felt needs is it meeting? Things are not always what they seem. When I was a student in New York, an Indian visitor came into the seminary chapel while the custodian was polishing some brasswork near the altar. The Indian, accustomed to seeing worshippers bring sweet-smelling offerings into the temple, bowed his head in reverence. "He is doing his *puja*" (presenting his sacrifice), he said. American missionaries who have lived for many years in the Orient have been much more mistaken about Indian practices. Scores of customs, seemingly absurd to us, are fraught with deep meaning for the national.

The domination of custom is too little understood by the missionary enterprise. Christianity desires to change men's religions all of a sudden, with no full realization of the effective interplay between the prospective convert and his functioning environment. What the missionary attributes to "hardness of heart" is, in most instances, the conservative force of custom. The group has survived because it has managed to live its life in a groove which has reduced both internal friction and outside interference. It is the way of wisdom to be slow in adopting change.

When Christianity meets a non-Christian culture it is both natural to expect resistance and wise to attempt to understand these resistances. Opposition

may range from the simple attempt to prevent the mission from gaining a foothold by refusing to sell or rent land for mission buildings, to threats on life—culminating in some instances in the actual taking of life. The three major resistances are:

1) Attempts on the part of the foreign nationals to preserve their cultural integrity;
2) Opposition based on political differences with the Western powers;
3) Attempts to check the advance of the new religion by removing the causes for criticism within the prevailing religion.

Any ancient culture resents our American assumption of superiority. "We have been civilized for thousands of years," say the Orientals. "We had a part in bringing civilization to the West. We were philosophers when you were barbarians." To compensate for the admitted technical superiority of the West, the Orientals make much of their own cultural or philosophic superiority. "You may be superior industrially," they say, "but we are superior in things of the spirit. There you cannot reach us." And the truth is that few missionaries are technically qualified to make a cultural or philosophic contribution to the East.

An illustration of this point is found in the March, 1947, issue of *The Aryan Path*, published in Bombay, India (p. 141), which reports editorially:

Shri K. Natarajan writes pertinently in *The Indian Social Reformer* for 11th January and 1st February, challenging recent statements of Indian leaders about India and religion. ". . . India," he declares, "is more soul than body. She has lived on despite starvation, disease and all kinds of distress, merely because of her faith in the unseen which, like fountains of sweet water in the sea, kept her whole."

Modern planners can never altogether quench in Indian hearts devotion and that "faith in the unseen" which has sustained them down the ages. "There is no empiricism about Indian religion," Shri Natarajan writes. "It is realized truth," and the Indian seers have pointed the way to realization to others. It is by virtue of that heart perception that India has survived; through it, that she can render her greatest service to the world.

Shri C. Rajagopalachari, laying recently the foundation stone of a metallurgical institute at Jamshedpur, had expressed the hope that science might succeed, where religion had failed, in uniting the communities of India. Scientific leaders do not share such optimism, Shri Natarajan writes. Man's power over nature has vastly increased but "man himself has remained aggressive, greedy, cruel."

It seems indeed incongruous, as Shri Natarajan writes, that "when the West disappointed, disillusioned, turns to India for light, our leading men are busy collecting the garbage of a decomposing system and holding it up for India to guide herself by."

All through the Orient, Christianity has witnessed the resistance of people, who though subject politi-

cally, have maintained their cultural and religious freedom. The conqueror had it within his power to compel political allegiance, but in the realm of religion the subject people could assert their independence. There is no question but that the growth of the Christian Church in India was checked by the rise of the National Movement and the subsequent refusal of the Nationalists to accept the religion of the British. Actually, the National Movement led to a strengthening of Hinduism, which was set forth, by various powerful groups, as the true religion of Hindustan.

In addition to the opposition associated with British rule, religious resistance in India has been related to domestic politics. Under a system of communal electorates, members of different religious communities have been given representation in government in proportion to their numerical strength. Hence, in addition to the normal antagonisms between religions, religious conversions have had definite political implications. It has been to the political advantage of each community, not only to hold its own members, but also to increase its numbers if possible. For this reason, conversion to any religion has been a touchy subject.

The healthiest resistance to Christianity is the active attempt on the part of members of non-Christian religions to reinterpret their religions in the light of newer knowledge so that they may meet in an increasing measure the demands of the modern age.

Professor Sir Sarvapali Radhakrishnan is the most articulate modern exponent of a reformed Hinduism. Addressing the Calcutta Missionary Conference in 1925, Professor Radhakrishnan said:

> Your work reminds us of the neglected truths of Hinduism, and for that we are thankful to you. . . . Hinduism is attempting to slough off its superstitions and purify itself, and there is no greater mission for you than to help in this process. Your task is not so much to make Christians of Hindus as to purify or Christianize (if that term is more acceptable to you) Hinduism. . . . While the Hindu is willing to regard Jesus as a striking character, revealing some of its divine attributes, he hesitates to accept Jesus as the unique revelation of God, bringing out the divine glory in all its fulness for all time. Such a kind of exclusive mediatorship and final revelation is inconsistent with the whole tradition of Hinduism.

The resistances to the advance of Christianity may result in:

1) Open conflict between religions.
2) The capitulation of one party or the other (conversion).
3) Arrival at a working agreement between religions, which on a lower level means live and let live, and on a higher level means co-operation.

Theistic religions, such as orthodox Christianity and Islam, find compromise difficult. Truth has been

revealed once and for all through the prophet. To find values in any other religion is to be disloyal to one's own religion. The truth must be defended and furthered at any cost. The early wars between Christians and Saracens and the more recent conflict between Muslims and Hindus in India are cases in point.

But as far as modern Christianity is concerned, the conflict is pretty well centered in the ideological field, where the battle lines are clearly drawn.

Missions traditionally have been iconoclastic. Since the convert is "a new man in Christ," the old must go. Missionaries in an excess of zeal have often swept the house clean, only to find the empty house soon occupied with a full complement of devils. I recall the village missionary who insisted that his new Hindu converts must carry their stone idols outside the village and smash them. The villagers somewhat hesitatingly complied, but the result was more serious than the missionary had foreseen. Having lost their own gods, and having not yet experienced the power of the Christian God, the whole village became ethically apathetic and immorality became rampant. Since the eye of the god was no longer upon them, what difference did it make?

The traveler in India may smile at a procession of Indian villagers carrying out the small-pox god, but when one lives in a village where the nearest doctor is miles away, one can feel a sense of kinship with these people. Smallpox, plague, and cholera are

very real enemies. I once asked a Christian village friend what his people did in time of sickness. "God is our doctor," he replied. A noble sentiment indeed, but without adequate medical attention the death rate in that village was alarmingly high.

The missionary has no right to cut a convert off from his old customs and culture unless he can offer a satisfactory functional substitute. When one compares the pageantry of Hinduism with the drabness of the Protestant Christian churches, one cannot but feel that something is lacking. One hesitates to criticize the developing Indian Church, but the fact remains that few second and third generation Christians can match the vitality and creativity of those great first generation converts who brought into Christianity a mature understanding of Hindu culture.

William Ernest Hocking reports a statement attributed to "one of the best-known missionaries in India." Said this missionary:

It is a remarkable fact that the outstanding Christians in India are first generation. . . . We had thought that the third and fourth generations would be much more outstanding (but what are the facts?). . . . The reason why these first generation people were wonderful was that they brought over their Hindu culture, and the were at home in their own categories. They had their roots back in their cultural past; therefore they were natural. The second generation was *taken out*, and became neither good Europeans nor good Indians. The

second and third generation Christians are neither this nor that. In that period, the Indian Christian had lost his soul. A nationalist said to me, "Your Indian Christian is a man out of gear: he isn't in gear with your people, and he is out of gear with us."[1]

Mr. Hocking's own comment is:

A valid conversion should result in a release of initiative and productivity, and a new freedom of imagination. In these qualities the new Churches of Asia have been singularly deficient. . . . They are like persons who have undergone a major surgical operation: they are saved to existence, but not to a normal vitality.[2]

The social consequences of conversion may be more far-reaching and less predictable than the individual consequences. Two quotations from F. S. C. Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West* illustrate this point. In discussing the destruction of Aztec culture in Mexico by the Christian religion, Professor Northrop says:

This should reveal the danger in bringing together differing moral ideals and religious values. At their worst the clubs of the savage, the swords of the conquistadors, and the bombs of the Nazis can break only the skulls of some men. It takes ideals and religion to enter into the imaginations and emotions of all and lay waste to their very souls. Not until man's cherished beliefs are cap-

[1] *Living Religions and a World Faith*, p. 150.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

tured can his culture be destroyed. This evil aspect of our own highest moral ideals and religious values has been overlooked because, in our blindness to ideals and values other than our own, we see only the new effects which our own provincial goods create and not the equally high values of the old culture which their coming has destroyed.[1]

In referring to the Orient, Professor Northrop says:

The acceptance of Christianity in the Orient presents dangers as well as political advantages. For no one in either the East or the West has yet shown how it is possible to convert Oriental people to the Christian religion without at the same time destroying the intuitive aesthetic unique cultural values of the East.

So serious is this danger that the Dutch Government, in order to preserve the artistic achievements of the natives of the East Indies, has prohibited in many instances the entrance of the Christian missionaries. William Ernest Hocking reports a conversation with a Dutch Protestant missionary who persuaded the Dutch Government to depart from its rule in his case because of his intense interest in encouraging the preservation of the remarkable artistic sense of the natives. He found to his dismay that as the converts became more and more serious Christians, they proceeded to drop their traditional aesthetic interests and values. When he asked them why this was the case in spite of his admonitions to the contrary, they wondered why he had not realized

[1] New York, The Macmillan Co., 1946, p. 22.

that the acceptance of the Western Christian religious teachings, in destroying the native religious doctrine, thereby took from the native aesthetic and emotional culture forms and practices the philosophical and Oriental religious basis which is their source and inspiration.

What must be realized is that nothing in any culture is more dangerous and destructive than the acceptance of new philosophical and religious beliefs, no matter how true and valuable, at the cost of the rejection of native beliefs which may be equally true and valuable. Yet this is precisely what the Christian gospel with . . . its claim to complete perfection requires and all too often achieves. To suppose that one can replace the traditional Oriental religions with the Christian religion in its present form without destroying the aesthetic values of the Orient rooted in the native religion, is to imagine that one can take the foundations from under a building and not have that building fall." [1]

A third solution to the impact of religions is to find a working arrangement which lessens the dangers arising from overt conflict between religious groups and which, though it may lead to conversion in certain instances, does not have conversion as its objective. This approach is the approach of co-operation.

A number of years ago, a press correspondent asked Mr. Gandhi what the future of missions in India would be under an Indian National Government. Mr. Gandhi's reported answer was: "If in-

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 430-31.

stead of confining themselves to humanitarian work and material service to the poor, they do proselytization by means of medical aid, education, etc., then I would certainly ask them to withdraw. Every nation's religion is as good as any other. Certainly India's religions are adequate for her people. We need no converting spiritually."

At once a great storm of missionary protest arose, to which protest Mr. Gandhi replied:

I have given so many interviews that I cannot recall the time or the occasion or the context for the statement. All I can say is that it is a travesty of what I have always said and held. My views on foreign missions are no secret. I have more than once expounded them before missionary audiences. I am therefore unable to understand the fury over the distorted version of my views.

Let me retouch the statement as I should make it: If instead of confining themselves purely to humanitarian work such as education, medical services to the poor and the like, they would use these activities of theirs for the purpose of proselytizing, I would certainly like them to withdraw. Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other. Certainly the great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another.

Let me amplify the bald statement. I hold that proselytization under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is most certainly resented by the people here. Religion after all is a deeply personal matter, it touches the heart. Why should I change my

religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease, or why should the doctor expect or suggest such a change while I am under his influence? Is not medical relief its own reward and satisfaction? Or why should I whilst I am in a missionary educational institution have Christian teaching thrust upon me? In my opinion these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.

I am not against conversion. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for the "next harvest."

Yes, I do maintain that India's great faiths are all-sufficing for her. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and its offshoots, Islam and Zoroastrianism are living faiths. No one faith is perfect. All faiths are equally dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted, therefore, is a living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. Through such friendly contact it will be possible for us all to rid our respective faiths of shortcomings and excrescences.

It follows from what I have said that India is in no need of conversion of the kind I have in mind. Conversion in the sense of self-purification, self-realization, is the crying need of the times. That, however, is not what is ever meant by proselytizing. To those who would convert India, might it not be said, "Physician heal thyself?" [1]

Although this statement of Mr. Gandhi stimulated much adverse criticism, it does contain a very large amount of truth. Christian missions have in times past been too much of a dividing force and too little on the side of co-operation. They have worked on the assumption that Christianity alone has the medicine that will cure the world's ills, and they have refused to call in specialists from other religions for consultation. They have, too often, chosen the wrong way of making Christian converts. They have, both wittingly and unwittingly, offered inducements to men to accept their religion and have violated individual personalities. The facts are on the record, and critics other than Mr. Gandhi have often brought them to light.

Missions, as at present constituted, follow the organizational pattern and use the language of political imperialism. Political imperialism talks in terms of British possessions, French possessions, or American possessions. Missionary imperialism talks about American Board areas, Presbyterian Board areas, or Methodist areas. The absurdity of this type of geo-

[1] *Young India,* April 23, 1931.

graphical occupation is seen very clearly in the mission with which I was associated in India, where we claimed to be working a territory 283 miles from east to west, and 150 miles from north to south, with individual missionaries supposedly responsible for districts containing 1,000 square miles.

The co-operative approach to missions would pay little attention to geography. The areas to be made whole are those that prevent men from living their lives to the full, wherever they may be found. Such a task is not a task for Christianity alone. It calls for the resources of all religions.

Mr. Gandhi's emphasis on interreligious co-operation, which is sounded repeatedly in the pages of this book, is a timely one. The conventional missionary approach, which seeks to bring about religious unity at the cost of cutting off the creativity that springs from a vitalized diversity in religion, is outmoded. Isolationism has had its day, whether in religion or politics. Similarly, imperialism is passing. The future lies with the co-operator.

In preparing this manuscript for publication I have rearranged radically the materials in the Indian edition, but in every case I have retained Gandhiji's own words and in no instance have I deviated from his original meaning. I have not attempted any strict chronological arrangement, because on this particular subject, there is no essential discrepancy between Mr. Gandhi's earlier and later utterances. Footnotes are numbered and appear in sequence on pages 133–

135. Since sentences and paragraphs are often taken from their context, reference is given both to the source of the quotation and to the entire original article in order that each quotation may be seen in its proper setting.

A glossary of all Indian terms is found on pages 137–140.

CLIFFORD MANSHARDT

THE MAHATMA
AND THE MISSIONARY

... I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. G.

(Harijan, April 29, 1933)

I

GANDHI'S INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY

Prefatory Note to Chapters I & II

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI was born October 2, 1869, in Porbander, Kathiawad. Kathiawad is a sub-province of Gujarat, in the province of Bombay, and was at that time divided into a number of native states. Gandhi's father was the Prime Minister of Porbander State.

Gandhi's childhood was spent in Porbander and Rajkot, the family having moved to Rajkot, when the elder Gandhi became the Prime Minister of the Rajkot State. It was in Rajkot that Mohandas received most of his early education.

The Gandhi family were members of the Vaisya or commercial caste, and by religion Vaishnavas. The most marked characteristic of the worship of Vishnu is that he is worshipped, not in his own person, but in that of one or another of his manifestations or incarnations. The most important of these manifestations are Rama and Krishna, heroes of the great epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.* Hence it was that Mohandas became familiar with the *Gita* and the great stories of Rama, Sita, Prahlad, Harischandra and the heroes of

the *Mahabbharata*. There was also a Jain influence in the family religion, for it was before a Jain sadhu that his mother took Mohandas before his departure for England, to take the vow to refrain from meat-diet, wine and women. The Jain teaching of the sacredness of all life exerted a profound influence on Gandhi's thinking.

Following high school at Rajkot, Mohandas went to Samaldas College at Bhavnagar, and at the age of 18, contrary to the wishes of his relatives, made up his mind to go to England for the study of law.

In 1888, Gandhi went to England, where he spent three years. In London he made friends among Christians and Theosophists and began a serious study of religion. When he returned to India, he began the practice of law, first in Rajkot and then in Bombay.

In Bombay he met a Jain youth, also from Kathiawad, Rajchandra Ravjibhai by name, who has been described as a religious genius, and who is believed to have influenced Gandhi's religious life more than any other single person. As he fluctuated between the practice of law and the study of religion, Gandhi's law practice suffered, so that from the standpoint of self-support as well as from that of his future service to humanity, it was fortunate that he accepted a post with a Mohammedan firm in South Africa, where he began the career that launched him as a world figure.

In South Africa, as in England, Gandhi made many Christian friends, among both the English and the Dutch. Thrown on his own resources, he began to read widely, completing some eighty books, mostly religious and philosophical, in a single year. His studies and thinking led him both to an appreciation of the worth of all religions and to a sure faith in the values of his

own religion. He rejected the idea of becoming a Christian and remained a staunch Hindu to the day of his death.

When he returned to India in 1914, Gandhi was a man of mature convictions. His experiences in South Africa had tested him, as in the fire. Religion had now become the one sure guide of his life. Gandhi was ready, intellectually and spiritually, for the turbulent decades that lay ahead.

FROM MY SIXTH or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part. And yet I kept on picking up things here and there from my surroundings. . . .

In Rajkot . . . I got an early grounding in toleration for all branches of Hinduism and sister religions. For my father and mother would visit the *Haveli* as also Shiva's and Rama's temples, and would take or send us youngsters there. Jain monks also would pay frequent visits to my father, and would even go out of their way to accept food from us non-Jains. They would have talks with my father on subjects religious and mundane.

He had, besides, Mussalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often

with interest. Being his nurse, I often had a chance to be present at these talks. These many things combined to inculcate in me a toleration for all faiths.

Only Christianity was at the time an exception. I developed a sort of dislike for it. And for a reason. In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there to hear them once only, but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time, I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about in European costume, including a hat. These things got on my nerves. Surely, thought I, a religion that compelled one to eat beef, drink liquor, and change one's own clothes did not deserve the name. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity.[1]

My association with Christians—not Christians so-called but real Christians—dates from 1889 when as a lad I found myself in London.[2] Towards the end of my second year in England . . . I met a good Christian from Manchester in a vegetarian boarding house. He talked to me about Christianity. I nar-

rated to him my Rajkot recollections. He was pained to hear them. He said, "I am a vegetarian, I do not drink. Many Christians are meat-eaters and drink, no doubt; but neither meat-eating nor drinking is enjoined by Scripture. Do please read the Bible." I accepted his advice and he got me a copy. I have a faint recollection that he himself used to sell copies of the Bible, and I purchased from him an edition containing maps, concordance and other aids. I began reading it, but I could not possibly read through the Old Testament. I read the book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the book of Numbers. But the New Testament produced a different impression, especially the Sermon on the Mount which went straight to my heart. . . .[3]

One day I accepted an invitation to attend Mr. Baker's prayer-meeting. There I was introduced to Miss Harris, Miss Gabb, Mr. Coates and others. Everyone kneeled down to pray and I followed suit. The prayers were supplications to God for various things, according to each person's desires. Thus the usual forms were for the day to be passed peacefully, or for God to open the doors of the heart.

A prayer was now added for my welfare: "Lord, show the path to the new brother, who has come amongst us. Give him, Lord, the peace that Thou

has given us. May the Lord Jesus who has saved us save him too. We ask all this in the name of Jesus." There was no singing of hymns or other music at these meetings. After the supplication for something special every day, we dispersed, each going to his lunch, that being the hour for it. The prayer did not take more than five minutes.

The Misses Harris and Gabb were both elderly maiden ladies. Mr. Coates was a Quaker. The two ladies lived together, and they gave me a standing invitation to four o'clock tea, at their house, every Sunday.

When we met on Sundays, I used to give Mr. Coates my religious diary for the week, and discuss with him the books I had read and the impression that they had left on me. The ladies used to narrate their sweet experiences, and talk about the peace they had found.

Mr. Coates was a frank-hearted staunch young man. We went out for walks together, and he also took me to other Christian friends.

As we came closer to each other, he began to give me books of his own choice, until my shelf was filled with them. He loaded me with books, as it were. In pure faith I consented to read all those books, and as I went on reading them, we discussed them.

I read a number of such books in 1893. I do not remember the names of them all, but they included the *Commentary* of Dr. Parker of the City Temple, Pearson's *Many Infallible Proofs* and Butler's

Analogy. Parts of these were unintelligible to me. I liked some things in them, while I did not like others. *Many Infallible Proofs* were proofs in support of the religion of the Bible as the author understood it. The book had no effect on me. Parker's *Commentary* was morally stimulating, but it could not be of any help to one who had no faith in the prevalent Christian beliefs. Butler's *Analogy* struck me to be a very profound and difficult book, which should be read four or five times to be understood properly. It seemed to me to be written with a view to converting atheists to theism. The arguments advanced in it regarding the existence of God were unnecessary for me, as I had then passed the stage of unbelief; but the arguments in proof of Jesus being the only incarnation of God and the Mediator between God and man left me unmoved.

But Mr. Coates was not the man easily to accept defeat. He had great affection for me. He saw, round my neck, the *Vaishnava* necklace of Tulasi-beads. He thought it to be superstition, and was pained by it. "This superstition does not become you. Come, let us break the necklace."

"No, you will not. It is a sacred gift from my mother."

"But do you believe in it?"

"I do not know its mysterious significance. I do not think I should come to harm if I did not wear it, but I cannot, without sufficient reason, give up a necklace that she put round my neck out of love

and in the conviction that it would be conducive to my welfare. When, with the passage of time, it wears away and breaks of its own accord, I shall have no desire to get a new one. But this necklace cannot be broken."

Mr. Coates could not appreciate my argument, as he had no regard for my religion. He was looking forward to delivering me from the abyss of ignorance. He wanted to convince me that, no matter whether there was some truth in other religions, salvation was impossible for me unless I accepted Christianity which represented *the* truth, and that my sins would not be washed away except by the intercession of Jesus, and that all good works were useless.

Just as he introduced me to several books, he introduced me to several friends whom he regarded as staunch Christians. One of these introductions was to a family which belonged to the Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect.

Many of the contacts for which Mr. Coates was responsible were good. Most struck me as being God-fearing. But during my contact with this family, one of the Plymouth Brethren confronted me with an argument for which I was not prepared:

"You cannot understand the beauty of our religion. From what you say it appears that you must be brooding over your transgressions every moment of your life, always mending them and atoning for them. How can this ceaseless cycle of action bring

you redemption? You can never have peace. You admit that we are all sinners. Now look at the perfection of our belief. Our attempts at improvement and atonement are futile. And yet redemption we must have. How can we bear the burden of sin? We can but throw it on Jesus. He is the only sinless Son of God. It is His word that those who believe in Him shall have everlasting life. Therein lies God's infinite mercy. And as we believe in the atonement of Jesus, our own sins do not bind us. Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And therefore Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts this great redemption can have eternal peace. Think what a life of restlessness is yours, and what a promise of peace we have."

The argument utterly failed to convince me. I humbly replied:

"If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless."

To which the Plymouth Brother rejoined: "I assure you, your attempt is fruitless. Think again over what I have said."

And the Brother proved as good as his word. He knowingly committed transgressions and showed me that he was undisturbed by the thought of them.

But I already knew before meeting with these friends, that all Christians did not believe in such a theory of atonement. Mr. Coates himself walked in the fear of God. His heart was pure, and he believed in the possibility of self-purification. The two ladies also shared this belief. Some of the books that came into my hands were full of devotion. So although Mr. Coates was much disturbed by this latest experience of mine, I was able to reassure him and tell him that the distorted belief of a Plymouth Brother could not prejudice me against Christianity.

My difficulties lay elsewhere. They were with regard to the Bible and its accepted interpretation. . . .[4]

Mr. Baker was getting anxious about my future. He took me to the Wellington Convention. The Protestant Christians organize such gatherings every few years for religious enlightenment or, in other words, self-purification. One may call this religious restoration or revival. The Wellington Convention was of this type. The chairman was the famous divine of the place, the Reverend Andrew Murray. Mr. Baker had hoped that the atmosphere of religious exaltation at the Convention, and the enthusiasm and earnestness of the people attending it, would inevitably lead me to embrace Christianity.

But his final hope was the efficacy of prayer. He had an abiding faith in prayer. It was his firm conviction that God could not but listen to prayer fervently offered. He would cite the instances of

men like George Muller of Bristol, who depended entirely on prayer even for his temporal needs. I listened to his discourse on the efficacy of prayer with unbiased attention, and assured him that nothing could prevent me from embracing Christianity, should I feel the call. I had no hesitation in giving him this assurance, as I had long since taught myself to follow the inner voice. I delighted in submitting to it. To act against it would be difficult and painful to me.

So we went to Wellington. Mr. Baker was hard put to it in having "a coloured man" like me for his companion. He had to suffer inconveniences on many occasions entirely on account of me. We had to break the journey on the way, as one of the days happened to be a Sunday, and Mr. Baker and his party would not travel on the Sabbath. Though the manager of the station hotel agreed to take me in after much altercation, he absolutely refused to admit me to the dining room. Mr. Baker was not the man to give way easily. He stood by the rights of the guests of a hotel. But I could see his difficulty. At Wellington also I stayed with Mr. Baker. In spite of his best efforts to conceal the little inconveniences that he was put to, I could see them all.

This Convention was an assemblage of devout Christians. I was delighted at their faith. I met the Reverend Mr. Murray. I saw that many were praying for me. I liked some of their hymns, they were very sweet.

The Convention lasted for three days. I could understand and appreciate the devoutness of those who attended it. But I saw no reason for changing my belief—my religion. It was impossible for me to believe that I could go to heaven or attain salvation only by becoming a Christian. When I frankly said so to some of the good Christian friends, they were shocked. But there was no help for it.

My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in Him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like god, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there might be some truth in it. Again, according to Christianity only human beings had souls, and not other living beings, for whom death meant complete extinction; while I held a contrary belief. I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the Cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept. The pious lives of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives just the same reformation that I had heard of

among Christians. Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or the greatest of all religions.

I shared this mental churning with my Christian friends whenever there was an opportunity, but their answers could not satisfy me.

Thus if I could not accept Christianity either as a perfect, or the greatest religion, neither was I then convinced of Hinduism being such. Hindu defects were pressingly visible to me. If untouchability could be a part of Hinduism, it could be but a rotten part or an excrescence. I could not understand the *raison d'être* of a multitude of sects and castes. What was the meaning of saying that the Vedas were the inspired Word of God? If they were inspired, why not also the Bible and the Koran?

As Christian friends were endeavouring to convert me, even so were Mussalman friends. Abdulla Sheth had kept on inducing me to study Islam, and of course he had always something to say regarding its beauty.

I expressed my difficulties in a letter to Raychandbhai. I also corresponded with other religious authorities in India and received answers from them. Raychandbhai's letter somewhat pacified me. He asked me to be patient and to study Hinduism more deeply. One of his sentences was to this effect: "On

a dispassionate view of the question, I am convinced that no other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision of the soul, or its charity."

I purchased Sale's translation of the Koran and began reading it. I also obtained other books on Islam. I communicated with Christian friends in England. One of them introduced me to Edward Maitland, with whom I opened correspondence. He sent me *The Perfect Way*, a book he had written in collaboration with Anna Kingsford. The book was a repudiation of the current Christian belief. He also sent me another book, *The New Interpretation of the Bible*. I liked both. They seemed to support Hinduism. Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance.

My studies thus carried me in a direction unthought of by the Christian friends. My correspondence with Edward Maitland was fairly prolonged, and that with Raychandbhai continued until his death. I read some of the books he sent me. These included *Panchikaran*, *Maniratnamala*, *Mumukshu Prakaran of Yogavasishtha*, *Haribhadra Suri's Shaddarshana Samuchchaya* and others.

Though I took a path my Christian friends had not intended for me, I have remained forever in-

debted to them for the religious quest that they awakened in me. I shall always cherish the memory of their contact. The years that followed had more, not less, of such sweet and sacred contacts in store for me. . . .[5]

If, in South Africa, I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service. And service for me was the service of India, because it came to me without my seeking, because I had an aptitude for it. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization.

Christian friends had whetted my appetite for knowledge which had become almost insatiable, and they would not leave me in peace, even if I had desired to be indifferent. In Durban Mr. Spencer Walton, the head of the South African General Mission, found me out. I became almost a member of his family. At the back of this acquaintance was of course my contact with Christians in Pretoria. Mr. Walton had a manner all his own. I do not recollect his ever having invited me to embrace Christianity. But he placed his life as an open book before me, and let me watch all his movements. Mrs. Walton was a very gentle and talented woman. I liked the

attitude of this couple. We knew the fundamental differences between us. Any amount of discussion could not efface them. Yet even differences prove helpful, where there are tolerance, charity and truth. I liked Mr. and Mrs. Walton's humility, perseverance and devotion to work, and we met very frequently.

This friendship kept alive my interest in religion. It was impossible now to get the leisure that I used to have in Pretoria for my religious studies. But what little time I could spare I turned to good account. My religious correspondence continued. Raychandbhai was guiding me. Some friend sent me Narmadshankar's book *Dharma Vichar*. Its preface proved very helpful. I had heard about the Bohemian way in which the poet had lived, and a description, in the preface, of the revolution effected in his life by his religious studies captivated me. I came to like the book, and read it from cover to cover with attention. I read with interest Max Muller's book, *India—What Can It Teach Us?* and the translation of the *Upanishads* published by the Theosophical Society. All this enhanced my regard for Hinduism, and its beauties began to grow upon me. It did not, however, prejudice me against other religions. I read Washington Irving's *Life of Mahomet and His Successors* and Carlyle's panegyric on the Prophet. These books raised Muhammad in my estimation. I also read a book called *The Sayings of Zarathustra*.

Thus I gained more knowledge of the different

religions. The study stimulated my self-introspection, and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies. Thus I began some of the Yogic practices, as well as I could understand them from a reading of the Hindu books. But I could not get on very far, and decided to follow them with the help of some expert when I returned to India. The desire has never been fulfilled.

I made too an extensive study of Tolstoy's books. *The Gospels in Brief*, *What To Do?* and other books made a deep impression on me. I began to realize more and more the infinite possibilities of universal love.

About the same time I came in contact with another Christian family. At their suggestion, I attended the Wesleyan Church every Sunday. For these days I also had their standing invitation to dinner. The church did not make a favourable impression on me. The sermons seemed to be uninspiring. The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious. They were not an assembly of devout souls; they appeared rather to be worldly-minded people going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom. Here, at times, I would involuntarily doze. I was ashamed, but some of my neighbours, who were in no better case, lightened the shame. I could not go on long like this, and soon gave up attending the service. . . .[6]

My final deliberate striving to realize Christianity

as it was presented to me was in 1901, when in answer to promises made to one of my Christian friends, I thought it my duty to see one of the biggest of Indian Christians, as I was told he was—the late Kali Charan Banerjee. I went over to him—I am telling you of the deep search that I have undergone in order that I might leave no stone unturned to find out the true path—I went to him with an absolutely open mind and in a receptive mood, and I met him also under circumstances which were most affecting. I found that there was much in common between Mr. Banerjee and myself. His simplicity, his humility, his courage, his truthfulness, all these things I have all along admired. He met me when his wife was on her death-bed. You cannot imagine a more impressive scene, a more ennobling circumstance. I told Mr. Banerjee, "I have come to you as a seeker. I have come to you in fulfilment of a sacred promise I have made to some of my dearest Christian friends that I will leave no stone unturned to find out the true light." I told him that I had given my friends the assurance that no worldly gain would keep me away from the light, if I could but see it. Well, I am not going to engage you in giving a description of the little discussion that we had between us. It was very good, very noble. I came away, not sorry, not dejected, not disappointed, but I felt sad that even Mr. Banerjee could not convince me. . . .[7]

Through the years Christian missionaries have

made many attempts to convert me. I was favoured with some literature even at Yeravda prison by well-meaning missionaries, which seemed to be written as if merely to belittle Hinduism. . . . But it is a matter of pleasure to me to be able to say that, if I have had painful experiences of Christians and Christian missionaries, I have had pleasant ones also which I treasure. There is no doubt that among them the spirit of toleration is growing. Among individuals there is also a deeper study of Hinduism and other faiths and an appreciation of their beauties, and among some even an admission that the other great faiths of the world are not false. One is thankful for the growing liberal spirit, but I have the conviction that much still remains to be done in that direction.[8]

2

GANDHI'S APPROACH TO RELIGION

Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the *Haveli*. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality being practiced there, and lost all interest in it. Hence I could gain nothing from the *Haveli*.

But what I failed to get there, I obtained from my nurse, an old servant of the family, whose affection for me I still recall. I have said before that there was in me a fear of ghosts and spirits. Rambha, for that was her name, suggested as a remedy for this fear, the repetition of *Ramanama*. I had more faith in her than in the remedy, and so at a tender age I began repeating *Ramanama* to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits. This was of course short-lived, but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today *Ramanama* is an infallible remedy for me.

Just about this time, a cousin of mine who was a devotee of *Ramayana* arranged for my second brother and me to learn *Rama Raksha*. We got it by heart, and made it a rule to recite it every morning

after the bath. The practice was kept up as long as we were in Porbander. As soon as we reached Rajkot, it was forgotten. For I had not much belief in it. I recited it partly because of my pride in being able to recite *Rama Raksha* with correct pronunciation.

What, however, left a deep impression on me was the reading of the *Ramayana* before my father. During part of his illness my father was in Porbander. There every evening he used to listen to the *Ramayana*. The reader was a great devotee of of Rama–Ladha Maharaj of Bileshvar. It was said of him that he cured himself of his leprosy not by any medicine, but by applying to the affected parts *bilva* leaves which had been cast away after being offered to the image of Mahadeva in Bileshvar temple, and by the regular repetition of *Ramanama*. His faith, it was said, had made him whole. This may or may not be true. We at any rate believed the story. And it is a fact that when Ladha Maharaj began his reading of the *Ramayana* his body was entirely free from leprosy. He had a melodious voice. He would sing the *Dohas* (couplets) and *Chopais* (quatrains), and explain them, losing himself in the discourse and carrying his listeners along with him. I must have been thirteen at that time, but I quite remember being enraptured by his reading. That laid the foundation of my deep devotion to the *Ramayana*. Today I regard the *Ramayana* of

Tulsidas as the greatest book in all devotional literature.

A few months after this we came to Rajkot. There was no *Ramayana* reading there. The *Bhagavat*, however, used to be read on every Ekadashi day. Sometimes I attended the reading, but the reciter was uninspiring. Today I see that the *Bhagavat* is a book which can evoke religious fervour. I have read it in Gujarati with intense interest. But when I heard portions of the original read by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya during my twenty-one days' fast, I wished I had heard it in my childhood from such a devotee as he is, so that I could have formed a liking for it at an early age. Impressions formed at that age strike roots deep down into one's nature, and it is my perpetual regret that I was not fortunate enough to hear more good books of this kind read during that period.[9]

Towards the end of my second year in England I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation—*The Song Celestial*—and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the divine Poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them I had not read the *Gita* but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring

out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them. The verses in the second chapter,

If one
Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds
Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.

made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears. The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me with the result that I regard it today as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom. I have read almost all the English translations of it, and I regard Sir Edwin Arnold's as the best. He has been faithful to the text and yet it does not read like a translation. Though I read the *Gita* with these friends, I cannot pretend to have studied it then. It was only after some years that it became a book of daily reading.

The brothers also recommended *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold, whom I knew till then as the author only of *The Song Celestial*, and I read it with even greater interest than I did the *Bhagavadgita*. Once I had begun it I could not leave off. They also took me on one occasion to the Blavatsky Lodge and introduced me to Madame Blavatsky and

Mrs. Besant. The latter had just then joined the Theosophical Society, and I was following with great interest the controversy about her conversion. The friends advised me to join the Society, but I politely declined, saying, "With my meagre knowledge of my own religion I do not want to belong to any religious body." I recall having read, at the brothers' instance, Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. This book stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.[10]

In Phoenix [South Africa] we had our daily prayers . . . and Mussalmans as well as Christians attended them along with Hindus. The late Sheth Rustomji and his children too frequented the prayer meetings. Rustomji Sheth very much liked the Gujarati *bhajan*, "*Mane valun*," "Dear, dear to me is the name of Rama." If my memory serves me right, Maganlal or Kashi was once leading us in singing this hymn, when Rustomji Sheth exclaimed joyously, "Say the name of Hormazd instead of the name of Rama." His suggestion was readily taken up, and after that whenever the Sheth was present, and sometimes even when he was not, we put the name of Hormazd in place of Rama. The late Husain, son of Daud Sheth, often stayed at the Phoenix Ashram, and enthusiastically joined our prayers. To the accompaniment of an organ he used to sing in a very sweet voice the song "*Hai bahare*

bag," "The garden of this world has only a momentary bloom." He taught us all this song, which we also sang at prayers. Its inclusion in our *Bhajanavaldi* is a tribute to truth-loving Husain's memory. I have never met a young man who practiced Truth more devotedly than Husain. Joseph Royeppen often came to Phoenix. He is a Christian, and his favorite hymn was "*Vaishnava jana,*" "He is a *Vaishnava* (servant of the Lord), who succours people in distress." He loved music and once sang this hymn, saying "Christian" in the place of *Vaishnava.* The others accepted his reading with alacrity and I observed this filled Joseph's heart with joy.[11]

Mussalmans and Christians in the household, not only all followed their own religious practices, but each co-operated with the other heartily in seeing that the practices were observed without a hitch or a jar. When the days of Ramzan came and the Mussalman members fasted without having even a drop of water during long hours, the Hindu members vied with one another in preparing all kinds of delicacies for those who had to break their fast after sunset, and the children, I suppose, looked forward to the break of the fast as they had a share of the nice things.[12]

When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, I can say I was

equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of these religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each. Some things I did not understand then, and do not understand even now, but experience has taught me that it is a mistake hastily to imagine that anything we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Some things which I did not understand first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy which leave no sting behind them.[13]

In spite of my being a staunch Hindu I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and therefore my Hinduism *seems* to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians, not even a Plymouth Brother, not even the most fanatical Mussalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds, because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position, I know, but to others, not to me.[14]

The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the devotees of the different religions. We want to reach not the dead level, but unity in diversity. Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, climate and other surroundings is not only bound to fail but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. Wise men will ignore the outward crust and see the same soul living under a variety of crusts. . . .[15] I want to see heart unity established among the people of this land professing different faiths. In nature there is a fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are no exception to the natural law. They are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity.[16]

I believe that Christianity is as good and as true a religion as my own. . . . There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or more or less perfect. . . .[17] For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect.[18]

We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation.

Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome these defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.[19]

The seat of religious authority lies within. I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Matthew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, "the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in Faith also, in things where Reason has no place, *e.g.*, the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason, "yet we are seven," I

would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect, "Yet there is God." [20]

God is certainly One. He has no second. He is unfathomable, unknowable, and unknown to the vast majority of mankind. He is everywhere. He sees without eyes, and hears without ears. He is formless and indivisible. He is uncreate, has no father, mother or child; and yet He allows Himself to be worshipped as father, mother, wife and child. He allows himself even to be worshipped as stock and stone, although He is none of these things. He is the most elusive. He is the nearest to us if we would but know the fact. But he is farthest from us when we do not want to realize his omnipresence.[21]

I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces, God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says: He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing, and so do the Hindu and, if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may each of us be putting our own interpretation on the word God—God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, how could we possibly measure His greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, wrangle about Him, and cut the throat of his fellow-man? How can we measure the greatness of

God who is so forgiving, so divine? Thus, though we may utter the same words they have not the same meaning for us all.[22]

I do not regard God as a person. Truth for me is God, and God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Because God is an Idea, Law Himself. Therefore it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law. He therefore does not rule our actions and withdraw Himself. When we say He rules our actions, we are simply using human language and we try to limit Him. Otherwise He and His Law abide everywhere and govern everything. Therefore I do not think that He answers in every detail every request of ours, but there is no doubt that He rules our action, and I literally believe that not a blade of grass grows or moves without His will. The free will we enjoy is less than that of a passenger on a crowded deck.

At the same time I feel a sense of freedom in my communion with God. I do not feel as cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.[23]

God is Truth, but God is many other things also. That is why I prefer to say Truth is God. But you need not go into what may sound like mystic lore; you may simply worship what you find to be the Truth, for Truth is known relatively. Only remember that Truth is not one of the many qualities that we name. It is the living embodiment of God, it is the only Life, and I identify Truth with fullest life, and that is how it becomes a concrete thing, for God is His whole creation, the whole Existence, and service of all that exists–Truth–is service of God.[24]

Revelation is the exclusive property of no nation, no tribe. I have no hesitation in regarding the Koran as revealed, as I have none in regarding the Bible, the *Zend Avesta*, the *Granth Saheb* and many other clean scriptures as revealed. . . .[25] It is an essentially untrue position to take, for a seeker after truth, that he alone is in absolute possession of truth. . . . When it comes to spiritual truths, either we are all untrue –quite a logical position to take–but since truth does not come out of untruth it is better to say that we all have truth but not the complete truth. For God reveals His truth to instruments that are imperfect. Raindrops of purest distilled water become diluted or polluted as soon as they come in contact with mother earth. . . . Religions are not in water-tight compartments. They are always growing. Let us not limit God's function. He may reveal Himself in a thousand ways and a thousand times.[26]

I do not regard every word of the Bible as the

inspired word of God, even as I do not regard every word of the Vedas or the Koran as inspired. The sum total of each of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The Bible is as much of a book of religion with me as the *Gita* and the Koran.[27]

I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. We need not dread, upon our grown-up children, the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when someone reads his own scriptures to young people with intention secretly or openly of converting them. He must then be biased in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the Bible, the Quran, and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu. He is no Sanatani Hindu who is narrow, bigoted, and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures to satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the

Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.[28]

I would dispute the claim that Christianity is the only true religion. It is also a true religion, a noble religion, and along with other religions it has contributed to raise the moral height of mankind. But it has yet to make a greater contribution. After all, what are 2,000 years in the life of a religion? Just now Christianity comes to yearning mankind in a tainted form. Fancy bishops supporting slaughter in the name of Christianity! . . .

In taking the position that all religions are true, it is necessary to distinguish between conflicting counsels. Hence in seeking the truth I am guided by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything, and I reject what conflicts with it. Similarly that which is in conflict with non-violence should be rejected. And on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with Reason must also be rejected.

There are subjects where Reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict Reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of Reason. Given these three criteria, I can have no difficulty in examining all claims made on behalf of religion. Thus to believe

that Jesus is the only begotten son of God is to me against Reason, for God can't marry and beget children. The word "son" there can only be used in a figurative sense. In that sense everyone who stands in the position of Jesus is a begotten son of God. If a man is spiritually miles ahead of us, we may say that he is in a special sense the son of God, though we are all children of God. We repudiate the relationship in our lives whereas his life is a witness to that relationship.[29]

I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God. That epithet in its material interpretation is quite unacceptable. Metaphorically we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus for me Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God. . . .

Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. But to say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man. And then in this matter I have a theory of my own. Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after the dissolution of the body. Therefore God alone is absolutely perfect. When He descends to earth, He of His own accord limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh. I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry.

There is no miracle in the story of the multitude being fed on a handful of loaves. A magician can create that illusion. But woe worth the day on which a magician would be hailed as the Saviour of humanity. As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well, I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a relative's child from supposed death to life, but that was because the child was not dead, and but for my presence there she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no miracle about it. I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us. We may divide Time for Him. Time for Him is eternity. For us there is past, present and future. And what is human life of a hundred years but less than a mere speck in the eternity of Time? [80]

Although I admire much in Christianity, I am unable to identify myself with Orthodox Christianity. I must say in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the *Bhagavadgita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the Sermon on the

Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess to you that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one trace of light on the horizon I turn to the *Bhagavadgita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and, if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgita*.[81]

I have been charged with being a secret Christian. The charge is both a libel and a compliment—a libel because there are men who can believe me to be capable of being secretly anything, *i.e.*, for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgment of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian or a Mussalman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Quran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian, and Mussalman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus nor Christians nor Mussalmans. There all are judged not

according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be those labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.[32]

3

GANDHI'S VIEWS ON CONVERSION

Prefatory Note to Chapter III

CASTE IS A SYSTEM, ancient in origin, which assigns to each individual his duty and his position in orthodox Hinduism. A man is born into his caste and in that caste he remains.

At the top of the system are the Brahmins, with a monopoly of the priestly office and a claim to the monopoly of knowledge. Originally, below the Brahmins, were found two other social compartments, the Kshatrya or warrior caste, and the Vaishya caste of traders and agriculturists. These three were the "Twice-born." Below them were the Sudras, destined to serve their superiors and to discharge menial occupations which it would be degrading for the Twice-born to fill. By degrees, this fourfold division of society was broken down into divisions and subdivisions, until a census list could enumerate 2,300 different castes.

At the lower end of the complicated scale of castes, and definitely below all others, are found the Depressed Classes—also known as the Outcastes, and designated by Gandhiji as the Harijans (People of God). According to the dictates of orthodox Hinduism, the Depressed Classes have historically been regarded as "untouchable,"

i.e., for all other Hindus they cause pollution by touch and defile food or water. They have further been denied access to Hindu temples. In the villages they are normally segregated in a separate quarter. Their disabilities vary from place to place, but at best their state is a truly unenviable one.[1]

Christian missions, in their approach to India, have found the Depressed Classes to be their most fertile field for converts. When Christianity came to India, offering her outcaste peoples hope and deliverance, a great number responded. Unfortunately, the thirst for righteousness was not always separated from the desire for food or economic advancement. Hence it came about that Christianity received into her fold large numbers of illiterate people—many of whom, through centuries of oppression, had acquired the mentality of slaves.

The conversion of large numbers of the Depressed Classes has created almost overwhelming problems for the Indian Christian Church, and at the same time has raised serious questions among Hindu thinkers concerning the true nature of the Christian missionary enterprise.

Gandhiji consistently took the position that the uplift of the Harijans and the removal of untouchability was a distinctly Hindu problem, and that Christian missions by separating individuals and groups from Hindu society were actually creating more problems than they were solving. From 1920, until the day of his death, Gandhiji placed the removal of untouchability in the forefront of his program.

[1] *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission*, I (1930), 34-41.

In South Africa I had a very good Mussalman client. He is, alas, dead now. The relation of client and counsel developed into one of close companionship and mutual regard. We often had religious discussions. My friend, though not learned in any sense of the term, had an intellect as sharp as a razor. He knew everything of the Koran. He knew something of other religions also. He was interested in my accepting Islam. I said to him, "I can pay full respect to the Koran and the Prophet, why do you ask me to reject the Vedas and the incarnations? They have helped me to be what I am. I find the greatest consolation from the *Bhagavadgita* and Tulsidas' *Ramayan.* I frankly confess that the Koran, the Bible and the other scriptures of the world, in spite of my great regard for them, do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayan* of Tulsidas." The friend despaired of me and had no hesitation in saying that there must be something wrong with me. His, however, is not an exceptional case because I have since met many Mussalman friends who have held the same view. I do, however, believe that this is a passing phase . . . for I have not a shadow of doubt that Islam has sufficient in itself to become purged of illiberalism and intolerance . . . and if I know Hinduism at all, it is essentially inclusive and ever-growing, ever-responsive. It gives the freest scope to imagination, speculation and reason. . . . For Hindus to expect Islam, Christianity or Zoroastrianism to be driven out of India is as idle a dream

as it would be for Mussalmans to have only Islam of their imagination to rule the world.[33]

In my opinion there is no such thing as proselytism in Hinduism as it is understood in Christianity or to a lesser extent in Islam. The Arya Samaj has, I think, copied the Christians in planning its propaganda. The modern method does not appeal to me. It has done more harm than good. Though regarded as a matter of the heart purely and one between the Maker and oneself, it has degenerated into an appeal to the selfish instinct. The Arya Samaj preacher is never so happy as when he is reviling other religions. My Hindu instinct tells me that all religions are more or less true. All proceed from the same God but all are imperfect because they have come down to us through imperfect human instrumentality. The real *Shuddhi* movement should consist in each one trying to arrive at perfection in his or her own faith. In such a plan character would be the only test. What is the use of crossing from one compartment to another, if it does not mean a moral rise? What is the meaning of my trying to convert to the service of God (for that must be the implication of *Shuddhi* or *Tabligh*) when those who are in my fold are every day denying God by their actions? "Physician heal thyself" is more true in matters religious than mundane. But these are my views. If the Arya Samajists think that they have a call from their conscience, they have a perfect right to conduct the movement. Such a burning call recognizes no time limit, no

checks of experience. . . . But no propaganda can be allowed which reviles other religions.

The best way of dealing with such propaganda is to condemn it publicly. Every movement attempts to put on the cloak of respectability. As soon as the public tear that cloak down, it dies for want of respectability. I am told that both Arya Samajists and Mussalmans virtually kidnap women and try to convert them. I have before me volumes of Agakhani literature which I have not yet had the time to study carefully, but I am assured that it is a distortion of Hinduism. I have seen enough of it to know that it describes H. H. the Aga Khan as a Hindu *Avatar*. It would be interesting to learn what the Aga Khan himself thinks of all this literature. I have many Khoja friends. I commend this literature to their attention. A gentleman told me that some agents of the Agakhani movement lend money to poor illiterate Hindus and then tell them that the debt would be wiped out if the debtor would accept Islam. I would regard this as conversion by unlawful inducements.

But the worst form is that preached by a gentleman of Delhi. I have read his pamphlet from cover to cover. It gives detailed instructions to preachers how to carry on propaganda. It starts with a lofty proposition that Islam is merely preaching of the unity of God. This grand truth is to be preached, according to the writer, by every Mussalman irrespective of character. A secret department of spies is advocated whose business is to be to pry into the

privacy of non-Muslim households. Prostitutes, professional singers, mendicants, Government servants, lawyers, doctors, artisans are pressed into service. If this kind of propaganda becomes popular, no Hindu household would be safe from the secret attention of disguised misinterpreters (I cannot call them missionaries) of the great message of the Prophet of Islam. I am told by respectable Hindus that this pamphlet is widely read in the Nizam's dominions, and that the methods advocated in it are extensively practiced in the Nizam's dominions.

As a Hindu I feel sorry that methods of such doubtful morality should have been seriously advocated by a gentleman who is a well-known Urdu author and has a large circle of readers. My Mussalman friends tell me that no respectable Mussalman approves of the methods advocated. The point, however, is not what the respectable Mussalmans think. The point is whether a considerable number of Mussalman masses accept and follow them.[84] . . . It is tragic to see that religion is dragged down to the low level of crude materialism, to lure people into which the most cherished sentiments of millions of human beings are trodden under foot.[85]

Christian missions are not beyond reproach. If I had power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing. It is the cause of much avoidable conflict between classes and unnecessary heart-burning amongst missionaries. But I should welcome people of any nationality if they came to serve here for the

sake of service. In Hindu households the advent of a missionary has meant the disruption of the family, coming in the wake of change of dress, manners, language, food and drink. . . .

Today, though the outward condition has perhaps changed, the inward mostly remains. Vilification of Hindu religion, though subdued, is there. . . . Only the other day a missionary descended on a famine area with money in his pocket, distributed it among the famine-stricken, converted them to his fold, took charge of their temple and demolished it. This is outrageous. The temple could not belong to the converted Hindus, and it could not belong to the Christian missionary. But this friend goes and gets it demolished at the hands of the very men who only a little while ago believed that God was there.[36]

Christianity as it is preached today has a commercial aspect. Not unless you isolate the proselytizing aspect from your educational and medical institutions are they of any worth. Why should students attending mission schools and colleges be compelled or even expected to attend Bible classes? If they must understand the message of Jesus, why not also of Buddha, Zoroaster and Mahomed? Why should the bait of education be offered for giving Bible education? . . . There is a subtle kind of propaganda when you expect students to attend Bible classes.[37]

As with education, so with hospitals. You may think me uncharitable, but so long as the mental

reservation is there that medical missionaries would like all their patients and co-workers to become converts to Christianity, so long will there remain a bar to real brotherhood. . . .[38] The gift of healing is commercialized, because at the back of the mind is the feeling that because of this service, some day the recipient of the gift will accept Christ. Why should not the service be its own reward? [39]

Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form.[40] . . . If a person, through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, goes over to another faith, it is a misnomer to call it conversion. Real conversion springs from the heart and at the prompting of God, not of a stranger. The voice of God can always be distinguished from the voice of man.[41]

No person can possibly say that what is best for him is best for all. Quinine may be the only means of saving life in your case, but may be a dangerous poison in the case of another. And again, is it not super-arrogation to assume that you alone possess the key to spiritual joy and peace, and that an adherent of a different faith cannot get the same in equal measure from a study of his scriptures? I enjoy a peace and equanimity of spirit which has excited the envy of many Christian friends. I have got it principally through the *Gita*.

When you consider other faiths as false, or so

adulterated as to amount to falsity, you shut your eyes to the truth that shines in the other faiths and which gives equal peace and joy to their votaries. I have not hesitated, therefore, to recommend to my Christian friends a prayerful and sympathetic study of the other scriptures of the world. I can give my own humble testimony that, whilst such study has enabled me to give the same respect to them that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision.[42]

It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. "Warring creeds" is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the mother—as I believe her to be—of Religion or religions. If she is truly the mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man is a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula, it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion, *i.e.*, God Himself.[43]

If Jesus came to earth again, he would disown many things that are being done in the name of Christianity. It is not he who says "Lord, Lord" that is a Christian, but "He that doeth the will of the Lord" that is a true Christian. And cannot he who has not heard the name of Christ Jesus do the will of the Lord? [44]

If a person wants to believe in the Bible, let him say so, but why should he disregard his own religion? This proselytization will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a very personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God.[45]

Accepting this position, we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu, or if we are Mussalmans, not that a Hindu or a Christian should become a Mussalman, nor should we even secretly pray that any one should be converted, but our inmost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian. . . . Hinduism with its message of *ahimsa* is to me the most glorious religion in the world—as my wife to me is the most beautiful woman in the world—but others may feel the same about their own religion. At the same time, cases of real conversion are quite possible. If some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion, let them do so.[46]

My own detached view may now be stated in a

few words. I believe that there is no such thing as conversion from one faith to another in the accepted sense of the term. It is a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. I may not have any design upon my neighbor as to his faith, which I must honor even as I honor my own. For I regard all the great religions of the world as true at any rate for the people professing them as mine is true for me. Having reverently studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them. I could no more think of asking a Christian or a Mussalman or a Parsi or a Jew to change his faith than I would think of changing my own. This makes me no more oblivious of the limitations of the professors of those faiths than it makes me of the grave limitations of the professors of mine. And seeing that it takes all of my resources in trying to bring my practice to the level of my faith and in preaching the same to my co-religionists, I do not dream of preaching to the followers of other faiths. "Judge not lest ye be judged," is a sound maxim for one's conduct. It is a conviction daily growing upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India, if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to Christianity, and destroying their social superstructure, which notwithstanding its many defects has stood now from time immemorial the onslaughts

upon it from within and from without. Whether they—the missionaries—and we wish it or not, what is true in the Hindu faith will abide, what is untrue will fall to pieces. Every living faith must have within itself the power of rejuvenation if it is to live.[47]

4

GANDHI'S VIEWS ON MASS CONVERSIONS

Prefatory Note to Chapter IV

THE TERM "*MASS MOVEMENT*," as used in missionary literature, refers to the baptism of the whole outcaste group in a particular village or area. The group may be large or small. The action is justified by missionary apologists on the ground that it is only by becoming a Christian or a Muslim that a member of the Depressed Classes can improve his status, and that since India is communally minded it is a natural thing for the people to make group decisions and take group action. The other side of the picture is the admission into Christianity of great numbers of people who have had no adequate preliminary preparation and who are then left with little or no opportunity for systematic religious nurture. It is held to be a source of weakness rather than of strength to the Church.

The Mass Movement issue came to the fore sharply in the fall of 1935, when Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an outstanding leader of the Depressed Classes, urged the Harijans to separate themselves from Hinduism and join any other religion which might afford "equality of status and treatment." Had the announcement had religious

implications only, there would have been less stir. But because of the political implications involved, the subject of mass conversion became a stormy issue.

The Morley-Minto reforms, embodied in the Indian Councils Act of 1909, first adopted the principle of separate representation for Mohammedans. According to this Act, Muslims were given separate electorates, while retaining their right to vote also in the general elections. The Government of India Act, 1919, following the Montagu-Chelmsford Report, continued the principle of separate electorates and laid down the proportion of Mohammedan seats in the various provincial councils, on a population and weightage basis.

The appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission in 1927, preliminary to the introduction of new reforms, was the beginning of a period of acute political consciousness on the part of both Hindus and Muslims. So long as authority was held tightly in British hands, neither community had great cause to fear the predominance of the other. But with the impending lessening of British control, both Hindus and Muslims entered the struggle for political power. Defections from the Hindu fold, or accessions to the Muslim fold, had definite political implications.

The Ambedkar proposal to withdraw the Harijans from Hinduism was a distinct political threat. Religious conversion, and more specifically mass conversions, descended from the spiritual realm to the realm of sordid political bickering. The part of Christian missions in this struggle was not above reproach.

I HAVE ALL my life believed in the doctrine of universal good, that life is not divided into separate air-tight compartments, but that it is on the contrary an undivided and indivisible whole; and therefore, what is or may be good for one must be good for all. Whatever activity fails to stand that unmistakable test is an activity that must be abjured by all who have the public weal at heart.

In accordance with this belief, I have never taken up any activity—be it sectional or national—which would be detrimental to the good of humanity as a whole. And in pursuing that universal goal I discovered years ago that untouchability, as it is practised today among Hindus, is a hindrance not only to the march of Hindus towards their own good, but also is a hindrance to the general good of all. He who runs may discover for himself how this untouchability has taken in its snaky coil not merely Caste Hindus but all other communities representing different faiths in India, that is to say, Mussalmans, Christians and others. In dealing with the monster of untouchability my own innermost desire is not that the brotherhood of Hindus only may be achieved, but it essentially is that the brotherhood of man—be he Hindu, Mussalman, Christian, Parsi or Jew—may be realized. For I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world, I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if

only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

Hence it is that I have not hesitated to ask all non-Hindus to help me with their prayer in this mission (for the removal of untouchability), and it is because I have a living faith in my mission and because that faith is based on an extensive experience that I have not hesitated to say with the greatest deliberation that, if we Hindus do not destroy this monster of untouchability, it will devour both Hindus and Hinduism. And when I ask you to purify your hearts of untouchability, I ask of you nothing less than this—that you should believe in the fundamental unity and equality of man. I invite you all to forget that there are any distinctions of high and low among the children of one and the same God.[48]

So far as I am concerned, the untouchability question is one of life and death for Hinduism. As I have said repeatedly, if untouchability lives, Hinduism perishes, and even India perishes; but if untouchability is eradicated from the Hindu heart root and branch, then Hinduism has a definite message for the world. I have said the first thing to hundreds of audiences, but not the latter part. Now that is the utterance of a man who accepts Truth as God. It is therefore no exaggeration. If untouchability is an integral part of Hinduism, the latter is a spent bullet. But untouchability is a hideous untruth. My motive in

launching the untouchability campaign is clear. What I am aiming at is not every Hindu touching an "untouchable," but every touchable Hindu driving untouchability from his heart, going through a complete change of heart.[49]

Speaking at the Bombay Presidency Depressed Classes Conference in Nasik some days ago (October, 1935), Dr. Ambedkar, an important Harijan leader, bitterly recounted treatment meted out by Caste Hindus to Harijans and said, "We shall carry our fight for equality where we are denied it. Because we have the misfortune to call ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we were members of another faith, none would dare treat us so." He advised his hearers to "choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment." "We shall repair our mistake now," he concluded. "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of untouchability, but it is not my fault and I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power." On Dr. Ambedkar's advice the Conference unanimously passed a resolution urging complete severance of the Depressed Classes from the Hindu fold and embracing any other religion which guaranteed them equal status and treatment with other members of it.

I regard both the speech of Dr. Ambedkar and the Conference Resolution of complete severance and acceptance of any faith that would guarantee equality to Harijans, as unfortunate events, especially when one notices that in spite of isolated events to the con-

trary untouchability is on its last legs. I can understand the anger of a high-souled and highly-educated person like Dr. Ambedkar over atrocities such as were committed in Kavitha and other villages. But religion is not like a house or a cloak which can be changed at will. It is a more integral part of one's self than one's body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's Creator, and whilst the body perishes, as it has to, religion persists even after death. If Dr. Ambedkar has faith in God, I would urge him to assuage his wrath and reconsider the position, and examine his ancestral religion on its own merits, not through the weakness of its faithless followers. Lastly, I am convinced that the change of faith by him and those who passed the resolution will not serve the cause they have at heart; for, millions of unsophisticated, illiterate Harijans will not listen to him and them, when they have disowned their ancestral faith, especially when it is remembered that their lives, for good or for evil, are intertwined with those of Caste Hindus.[50]

Ever since Dr. Ambedkar has thrown his bombshell in the midst of Hindu society in the shape of threatened conversion, frantic efforts have been made to wean him from the proposed step. Dr. Ambedkar's threat has had its repercussions on Harijans too, who are at all literate and are able to read newspapers. They have begun to approach Hindu institutions or reformers with a demand for posts, scholarships, or the like, accompanying it with the

statement that the writer might, in the event of refusal, be obliged to change to another faith, aid having been offered on behalf of the representatives of that faith.

Without a doubt these threats are a portent and a matter of grave concern to those who care at all for the religion of their forefathers. But it will not be served by coming to terms with those who have lost their faith in Hinduism or for that matter in any religion. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. . . . If, therefore, any Harijan wants to give up Hinduism, he should be entirely free to do so.

There must be a searching of heart for the reformer. Has his practice or that of his neighbor's caused the defection? If it has and if it is found to be improper, it must be changed.

It is an admitted fact that the conduct of a vast number of Hindus who call themselves Sanatanists is such as to cause the greatest inconvenience and irritation to Harijans all over India. The wonder is that many more Harijans than already have, have not left Hinduism. It speaks volumes for their loyalty or for the innate virtue of Hinduism that millions of Harijans have clung to it in spite of the inhumanities to which in the name of that very faith they have been subjected.

The wonderful loyalty of Harijans and their unexampled patience render it imperative for every Savarna Hindu to see that Harijans receive the same

treatment that every other Hindu does. The course before Savarnas is, therefore, on the one hand not to interfere with Harijans wishing to leave the Hindu fold by trying to keep them within it by the offer of bribes in the shape of finding employment or scholarships; and on the other hand to insist on full justice being done to Harijans in every walk of life. Indeed reformers should anticipate the Harijans' requirements and not wait till they begin to complain. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is the biggest institution for the removal of untouchability. It has wisely adopted a most liberal policy of giving scholarships to deserving students. It employs as many Harijans as possible. But it is in no sense a bureau for finding jobs for unemployed Harijans. Generally speaking, there is no dearth of jobs for Harijans who are fit for the jobs for which they offer themselves. The greatest hardship felt by thousands of Harijans is want of pure water for drinking and domestic use, denial of access to public schools and other institutions, constant pin-pricks in villages, and last but not least, denial of access to temples of worship. These disabilities are stern realities in the lives of the vast mass of Harijans. If they as a mass give up Hinduism, they will do so because of these common disabilities which brand them as lepers of Hindu society. Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial by the so-called Savarna Hindus of

elementary justice to Harijans. Every threat of conversion is, therefore, a warning to Savarnas that, if they do not wake up in time, it may be too late.

One word to the impatient and needy Harijans. They must not use threats when they approach Hindu institutions or individuals for help. They should rely upon the strength of their case commanding a hearing. The majority of Harijans do not know what change of religion can mean. They mutely suffer the continuing degradation to which Savarnas in their selfishness have consigned them. They must be the primary care of Hindu reformers whether they complain or do not. Those who are enlightened enough to know and feel the degradation and know also what change of religion means are either too good Hindus to desert their ancestral faith and deserve every help they need, or being indifferent as to religion may not claim help from Savarna Hindus in exchange for their condescending to remain in the Hindu fold. I would, therefore, plead with enlightened Harijans for their own sakes not to seek material betterment under threat of conversion. And whilst reformers must on no account yield to threats, they must ceaselessly strive to secure justice at the hands of Savarna Hindus.[61]

There is little virtue in opening temples to Harijans simply because they demand such opening. But when temples are opened because of a sense of sin for which there should be atonement, such opening becomes a religious act. I should insist on Hindu

temples being thrown open to Harijans even if the Harijans in India were converted to another religion and there was only one Harijan left in the Hindu fold. It is this religious attitude that isolates the Harijan question from all other questions, and gives it a special importance. If our present program was merely one of policy or political expediency, it would not have the religious significance that it has for me. If it was demonstrated to me to my satisfaction that the political or economic regeneration of Harijans would be enough to retain the Harijans in the Hindu fold, I should still want to open the temples and remove every trace of inequality. Because for me it is . . . a question of repentance and reparation for the wrong we have done to our fellowmen.

Thus the threat of the conversion of Harijans to other religions, which is agitating so many Hindus today, has no bearing on our duty to Harijans. If we begin to quicken our activities, because of the threat of conversion, then such opening will lose the significance which I have outlined. I promise you that Hinduism will not be saved by such means.

Hinduism can only be saved when it has become purified by the performance of our duty without the expectation of any return whatsoever from the Harijans. Nothing less than that can possibly save Hinduism. If you do something by Harijans as a matter of expediency or political manœuvre, you have not rid yourselves of untouchability in your hearts. There

will come many occasions when that poison will erupt on the Hindu social organism to such an extent that we shall be confounded. If we are ashamed of untouchability, we must shed it, no matter what results follow or may not follow.[52]

The Yeravda Pact, between one large section of Hindus and another, frustrated the attempt to cut the Hindu body into two and gave the opportunity to Savarna Hindus to make reparation to those millions whom they had ill-treated for centuries. . . . If Dr. Ambedkar's present proposal were accepted, the reform movement would receive a setback which might mean death to it in the end. For it contemplates a paper but legal transfer of Harijans from the Hindu fold to some other, no matter by what name the latter is called. It must mean fratricide. Harijans themselves would be cut up into two rival sections, and if they would both be classed as Harijans within the meaning of the Pact, their state would be worse than it is today.

It is futile to argue that if the Harijans should be led into the Sikh fold there would be a nominal change of religion but not a real one, and that at any rate it would not be so bad as if Harijans were called Christians or Muslims. If it is a change of religion, it matters little under what label they are classified. To claim to belong to another religion and still remain Harijans would simply create an additional cause of internecine quarrel. . . .

And how can self-constituted leaders barter away

the religious freedom of Harijans? Has not every Harijan, however dull or stupid he may be, the right to make his own choice? It is one thing for Dr. Ambedkar and those who wish to change over to some other religion to do so, and wholly another for political and other parties to assume such change for the mass of Harijans and to base thereon legal and other consequences of a far-reaching character.[58]

The attitude of the Christian missionaries has been as bad as that of the rest who are in the field to add to their numbers. What pains one is their frantic attempt to exploit the weakness of Harijans. If they said, "Hinduism is a diabolical religion and you come to us," I should understand. But they dangle earthly paradises in front of the Harijans and make promises to them which they can never keep. When in Bangalore a deputation of Indian Christians came to me with a number of resolutions which they thought would please me, I said to them: "This is no matter for bargain. You must say definitely that this is a matter to be settled by the Hindus themselves." Where is the sense of talking of a sudden awakening of spiritual hunger among the untouchables and then trying to exploit a particular situation? . . . It is absurd for a single individual to talk of taking all the Harijans with himself. Are they all bricks that can be moved from one structure to another? If Christian missions here want to play the game, and for that matter Mussalmans and others, they should have

no such idea as that of adding to their ranks whilst a great reform in Hinduism is going on.[54]

I cannot help saying that the activities of the missionaries in this connection have hurt me. They with the Mussalmans and Sikhs came forward as soon as Dr. Ambedkar threw the bombshell, and they gave it an importance out of all proportion to the weight it carried, and then ensued a rivalry between these organizations. I could understand the Muslim organizations doing this, as Hindus and Muslims have been quarreling. The Sikh intervention is an enigma. But the Christian mission claims to be a purely spiritual effort. It hurt me to find Christian bodies vying with Muslims and Sikhs in trying to add to the numbers of their fold. It seemed to me an ugly performance and a travesty of religion. They even proceeded to enter into secret conclaves with Dr. Ambedkar.[55]

The following paragraph occurs in the report of a meeting of Christian denominations, held in London about October 9, 1936. His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury presided. The extract is from *The Church Times* of October 16:

The next speaker was dressed as a layman, without even the smallest discernible purple patch to indicate that he was Dr. J. W. Pickett, a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, U.S.A. For some years past, Dr. Pickett has been studying the mass movements on the spot in India, and has published the results of his observations in "Christian Mass Movements in India," described

by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a remarkable and valuable book. Dr. Pickett is profoundly impressed with the spiritual significance of the movement. He said that four and a half millions of the depressed classes in India have become the disciples of our Lord, and the witness they bear to Him in their lives is making the multitudes in India marvel. Even Brahmins have testified—albeit reluctantly—to the power of Christianity to transform the characters and lives of people whom they once thought incapable of religious feelings, and to whom they denied the right of entrance to the temples of Hinduism. It is people of this kind, said Dr. Pickett, who have now standards of church attendance and worship difficult to equal in Western Christendom. He quoted an example in the Telugu area, where 900,000 people now profess the Christian Faith. Out of 1,026 villages, 1,002 hold a service for the worship of God every evening of the year, and more than two hundred also a daily morning service. It appeared to satisfy Dr. Pickett entirely as a test of the reality of the faith of the converts to hear a surprisingly high proportion of them speak of a sense of mystical union with God, and their belief that God had come into their lives. Even their Hindu neighbors admitted that the religion of Jesus Christ had lifted them to a new standard of cleanliness of person and home, and made them a trustworthy people. More impressive still is the fact that high caste people are now coming into the Church, literally by dozens and hundreds, in areas where this transformation of life has occurred among the untouchables. "It is a miracle," he declared, "one of the great miracles of Christian history."

I have rarely seen so much exaggeration in so little space. A reader ignorant of conditions in India would conclude that the figures relate to the conversions due to the movement led by Dr. Ambedkar. I am sure Dr. Pickett could not have made any such claim. He has in mind the figures to date commencing from the establishment of the first church in India hundreds of years ago. But the figures are irrelevant to the general claim said to have been advanced by the Bishop. Where are "the multitudes in India who marvel" at the transformation in the lives of "four and a half millions of the depressed classes"? I am one of the multitude, having practically travelled more than half a dozen times all over India, and have not seen any transformation on the scale described by Dr. Pickett, and certainly none of recent date. I have had the privilege of addressing meetings of Indian Christians who have appeared to me to be no better than their fellows. Indeed the taint of untouchability persists in spite of the nominal change of faith so far as the social status is concerned. Needless to say I am referring to the masses, not individuals. I should like to know the Brahmins "who have testified—albeit reluctantly—to the power of Christianity to transform the characters and lives of people whom they once thought incapable of religious feeling." But if it is of any consequence, I can show many Brahmins who can testify to the power of the reform movement to make a radical change in the lives and outlook of Harijans who were neglected by Caste

Hindus. I must pass by the other unbelievable generalizations. But I should like to know the hundreds of High Caste Hindus who are "now coming into the Church in areas where this transformation of life has occurred among the Untouchables." If all the astounding statements Dr. Pickett has propounded can be *substantiated, truly it is "one of the great miracles* of Christian history," nay, of the history of man.

But do miracles need an oratorical demonstration? Should we in India miss such a grand miracle? Should we remain untouched by it? Miracles are their own demonstration. As witness the miracle in Travancore. Nobody believed a month ago that the more than 2,000 temples of Travancore could be opened to Harijans, and that Harijans would enter them in their hundreds without let or hindrance from the most orthodox Hindus. Yet that event has happened in Travancore which even he who runs may see. It is beside the point whether it can be called a miracle or not. I see in it the visible finger of the Invisible God.

I believe in the Bible as I believe in the *Gita*. I regard all the great faiths of the world as equally true with my own. It hurts me to see any one of them caricatured as they are today by their own followers and as has been done by the learned Bishop, assuming of course that the report reproduced above is substantially correct.[56]

In the same strain as Dr. Pickett's address is a pamphlet prepared by Prebendary W. W. Cash and

published by the Church Missionary Society of England:

> The C. M. S. is appealing for an emergency fund of £25,000 to enable extra grants to be made during the next five years to those areas where this big movement is taking place, and the Society appeals to the whole Church to support it in this effort. Not for ourselves do we ask people to give, but for the sake of the hundreds of thousands who are dimly groping after Christ, and who are finding spiritual life and social uplift through the Gospel.

The "big movement" referred to is the movement for the conversion of Harijans. The money is wanted for work in the Telegu area and Travancore.

The appeal ends thus:

> The movement among the outcastes is spreading to the caste-people, and within the last five years it is estimated that no less than 30,000 caste-people from fifty-one different castes have become Christians. This is a movement of such far-reaching consequences that we dare not refuse help. The thousands of today may become millions tomorrow. Will you help us to go forward in a great advance that the harvest may be reaped?

Its opening sentences run as follows:

> Recent news in the papers has attracted widespread attention to the untouchables of India. We have read of great conferences of outcaste peoples who have decided

to break away from Hinduism. We have heard of mass movements towards Christianity, and baptisms of tens of thousands of converts in recent years. We have followed with growing interest the development of the young churches in these rural areas, particularly in the Dornakal and Travancore Dioceses. We are therefore compelled to examine more closely what is happening in India and to see how far we are reaping the harvest which has come.

It contains among others these three headlines:

1. "What is happening among these people?"
2. "Who is Dr. Ambedkar?"
3. "What does India say to Dr. Ambedkar's advice?"

I cull the following from what appears under the third headline:

There is no doubt that there have been important repercussions all over India from the conference of untouchables. Mr. Gandhi had previously carried on a campaign for the removal of untouchability, but he has signally failed because he clung to the Hindu system which has been the cause of the trouble.

In passing I may remark that I am utterly unconscious of "signal failure." I have not clung to "the Hindu system which has been the cause of the trouble." On the contrary I have rejected that which has been the cause of the trouble, namely untouch-

ability. And I have not abandoned the campaign as suggested in the quotation.

Under the same headline occurs also this paragraph:

> In the C.M.S. area of the Dornakal Diocese there are no less than three hundred villages appealing for teachers; they represent forty thousand people definitely asking for baptism. The Bishop reckons that probably about a million people in his diocese are moving Christward.

Though I have travelled in the Telegu area often enough I have never heard of forty thousand Harijans asking for baptism or any figure near it.

Under the same headline occurs also this precious paragraph:

> In Travancore, the Ezhava community are definitely on the trek. They are a superior type of the "exterior" castes. Many of them are educated; some are landowners, others lawyers, doctors, officials and teachers; but they are excluded from the temples and suffer from the disabilities of the outcaste community. The leaders of one section of these people numbering over 850,000 have waited on the Bishop in Travancore, because they are anxious that their entire community should become Christians. This is by no means entirely due to Dr. Ambedkar, but is another incident in a situation which is growing in magnitude from day to day.

I dare not speak for the Ezhava leaders. The papers report them to have congratulated the Maharaja

on his Proclamation (declaring temples open to Harijans). But that may not be inconsistent with their anxiety that their entire community should become Christians. Let them speak, if they will, on the contents of the quotation.

The exaggerations of Bishop Pickett, dealt with above, are perhaps beaten by those contained in this appeal. There is no other way to deal with such exaggerations than by living them down and by the truth working through the lives of the reformers. The appeal deals not with the past but with contemporary events. And if millions are waiting to bear witness to the message of Christ, as, and in the form in which it comes through the agents of the C.M.S., my disbelief in the statements made in the appeal will melt like snow under the rays of the midday sun.[57]

A somewhat different document, but one which I regard as unfortunate, is a joint manifesto, issued by fourteen highly educated Indian Christians occupying important social positions, setting forth their views on the missionary work among Harijans. The manifesto follows in its entirety:

OUR DUTY TO THE DEPRESSED AND BACKWARD CLASSES

An Indian Christian Statement

As Indian Christians interested in the welfare of the country and the future of Christianity in the land, we

feel called upon to give utterance to certain convictions which are forced upon us by the propaganda that is being carried on in this country and in the West regarding the present so-called unparalleled opportunities for the spread of the Gospel among the Depressed and Backward classes in India, and the consequent misunderstanding that has arisen in the minds of non-Christians.

Section I

Our Analysis of the Situation

The general unrest in the country during the past century has contained a note of religious quest among the people of India from the highest to the lowest. But, due chiefly to the spread of nationalism, religious values seem to have receded into the background; and in such cases as the self-respect and certain forms of socialist movements they seem to have been discarded as anti-social and anti-national.

An arresting feature of the national upheaval is the spirit of revolt manifested by the leaders of the Depressed and Backward classes against the lot that was assigned to their people in the social, economic and religious fabric of Hindu Society for centuries and the large measures of sympathy with which their demand for drastic remedies for their desperate situation is being met by Hindu reformers. We cannot fail to note that these efforts have achieved a signal success in the great Temple Entry Proclamation made by the Ruler of what was reputed to be a conservative and orthodox Hindu State.

There has always been a dissatisfaction with the

tyranny of caste among liberal-minded Hindus. But at the present moment the incentive to the removal of the age-long grievances of the Depressed and Backward classes comes more from nationalistic and humanitarian than from religious considerations. The nationally minded Hindu, who regarded caste and untouchability as a blot on his civilization and looked with sullen displeasure on the steady drifting of many members of these classes into other religious communities, was suddenly awakened to the immense danger lurking in this drift, especially by the communal basis on which the privileges of the new Constitution have been devised. Promoted by the feeling that the Indian Christian community has, on the whole, remained outside the current of national effort and aspiration, the Hindu has come to regard any migration, large or small, from the Hindu to the Christian community as a loss to the nation.

The entry of a political value into the realm of religion has had a twofold consequence. In the first place, the Hindu can no longer look with equanimity upon conversion from Hinduism to other faiths, for they constitute a direct blow to his political strength. In the second place, one strand of worldly motives which may enter into and vitiate religious conversions has been eliminated inasmuch as the Depressed and Backward classes are better off within the Hindu fold than outside it. A sifting and testing of motives has begun to operate just now, and symptoms and signs of a movement from Hinduism to Islam or Christianity which were assessed so late as a year or even six months ago will have to be re-assessed, if indeed they continue

to appear in anything like the strength in which they appeared then.

In view of the political complications that have got so inextricably mixed with the uprising of the Depressed and Backward classes and their desire for a fuller life, the redoubled enthusiasm of Muslims and Christian leaders to commend their religions to the acceptance of those people has naturally aroused the suspicion and resentment of Hindus. Communal animosities are therefore bound to be intensified in the near future. This is a prospect which no Christian in India can contemplate with indifference. The danger present in this situation need not be emphasized. But it is necessary to point out that herein the Christian with a true missionary motive has the opportunity to conserve all that is conducive to national unity and depth of spirituality.

Section II

Convictions and Conclusions

The above analysis, which we believe will appear correct to all who have watched the movement among the Depressed and Backward classes and the sudden impetus it has received from the promulgation of the Indian Constitution, has brought to us these convictions and leads us to these conclusions:

1. We sympathize with the Depressed and Backward classes in their struggle to secure for themselves a fuller life and rejoice with them and Hindu reformers over the success that has attended their combined efforts at social and economic uplift and over the fact of their having won full recognition of the principles of reli-

gious equality in Travancore. We trust that they will gain further successes in these directions.

2. We believe that the process of absorption of the Depressed and Backward classes into the Hindu community, in which a serious beginning has been made, is likely to confer on the present generation of the Depressed and Backward classes immediate benefits on a large scale which the Church will not be able to give to the whole community.

3. We are of the opinion that with the political privileges which the Indian Constitution and the Poona Pact have conferred on these classes, with the special educational and other advantages provided in many Indian Provinces for their exclusive uplift, and with this great gesture of friendliness which the Caste Hindus have shown them, they will not have the same dissatisfaction with Hinduism which oftentimes led them to gravitate towards Christianity or Islam. Therefore we are unable to share the hope that the present upheaval is going to result in an influx of the Depressed and Backward classes into the Christian Church in the phenomenal measure in which, it is said, it is going to happen.

4. We believe that the Christian Church in India should welcome this movement not only as a laudable effort to expel from Hinduism an out-of-date and unholy institution but as a reform which is bound to *have a wholesome effect on the entire social structure* of India including the Indian Church, by solving the problem of caste prejudices in the home of their origin. We believe that this is certainly an effective way in which caste which has proved itself such an insidious

danger to the Christian Church can also be most successfully overcome.

5. In our view there is an obvious danger in any propaganda by Christians in which the religious element of the unrest is stressed, to the extent of obscuring its real nature as a social upheaval. An aggressive evangelistic program formulated in these circumstances will, besides being misunderstood as an exploitation of the difficulties of the Hindus, result in undermining any attempt at concerted action on the part of all communities so necessary for the success of this great endeavor towards social justice.

6. Mass Conversions, from the point of view of the Depressed and Backward classes, were in the past mainly the outcome of the desire for social justice and all-round uplift, and the Christian Church has succeeded in helping large sections of converts from these communities to a higher standard of life—social, economic, moral and spiritual—and to real transformation in the life and character of individuals and groups belonging to these classes. Further, these results have provoked the serious thought and attention of the privileged classes to the claims and aspirations of the Depressed and Backward classes. We have, however, to recognize that these mass conversions have generally lowered Christian standards so badly as to have left for the Indian Church a legacy of deplorable caste prejudices and jealousies, on account of which its progress, solidarity and its proclaimed witness to the oneness of all humanity in Christ Jesus suffer not a little even to this day.

7. We recognize that in an atmosphere free from the heat and dust of the present upheaval and apart from

all political considerations, Christianity will continue to exercise the attraction which it has always had for the poor of the land and others in whom a hunger for the things of the spirit has been awakened. Men and women, individually and in family or village groups, will continue to seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. That is the real movement of the Spirit of God. And no power on earth can stem that tide. It will be the duty of the Christian Church in India to receive such seekers after the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and provide for them instruction and spiritual nurture. The Church will cling to its right and receive such people into itself from whatever religious group they may come. It will cling to the further right to go about in these days of irreligion and materialism to awaken spiritual hunger in all.

Indian public men shall have to concede, as indeed they have done in the Karachi Congress Resolutions, to all religious groups the right not only to profess and practice, but also to propagate their religions. And in view of what Christianity has done to those who have entered the Church and to the whole of the country as a moral force and spiritual leaven, they would not want to curtail its freedom to continue to render this unique service.

8. We are convinced that the Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel not only to the poor and downtrodden masses in India but to all sections of the country's population, and that the task before the Indian Church is to permeate the ideology and outlook of the land with a genuine respect for the teachings of Jesus and a willingness to accept His leadership in all that concerns personal happiness and national well-being. The service

that it can render to the Depressed and Backward classes and its own development in membership as well as in spirituality should form part of this larger program. We recognize with thankfulness that this larger task of evangelization, unaffected by economic and political upheavals, has been and is going on. Therefore we deem it very unwise at this juncture to alienate the sympathy and spoil the open-mindedness of the Hindu to the Gospel by any ill-considered attempts at external results of a questionable value. The Indian Church by availing itself of the present opportunity to show that it is one with the rest of the people of the land in its desire to support every good cause that makes for economic uplift, social justice, national solidarity and genuine spirituality, should disarm suspicion and win for itself recognition as a national asset in the best sense of the term. Thus and thus only it can augment the leavening process which is also an important task of the Church and commend the Gospel to the whole of India.

It appears to me that the authors have fallen between two stools in their attempt to sit on both. They have tried to reconcile the irreconcilable. If one section of Christians has been aggressively open and militant, the other represented by the authors of the manifesto is courteously patronizing. They would not be aggressive for the sake of expedience. The purpose of the manifesto is not to condemn unequivocally the method of converting the illiterate and the ignorant, but to assert the Right of preaching the Gospel to the millions of Harijans. The key to the

manifesto is contained in paragraphs 7 and 8. This is what one reads in paragraph 7: "Men and women individually and in family or village groups will continue to seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. That is the real movement of the Spirit of God. And no power on earth can stem that tide. It will be the duty of the Christian Church in India to receive such seekers after the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and to provide for them instruction and spiritual nurture. The Church will cling to its right to receive such people into itself from whatever religious group they may come. It will cling to the further right to go about in these days of irreligion and materialism to awaken spiritual hunger in all." These few sentences are a striking instance of how the wish becomes father to the thought. It is an unconscious process but not on that account less open to criticism. Men and women do not seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. Poor Harijans are no better than the others. I wish they had real spiritual hunger. Such as it is, they satisfy by visits to the temple, however crude they may be. When the missionary of another religion goes to them, he goes like any vendor of goods. He has no special spiritual merit that will distinguish him from those to whom he goes. He does, however, possess material goods which he promises to those who will come to his fold. Then mark, the duty of the Christian Church in India turns into a right. Now when duty becomes a right, it ceases to be a duty. Performance of a duty

requires one quality—that of suffering and introspection. Exercise of a right requires a quality that gives the power to impose one's will upon the resister through sanctions devised by the claimant or the law whose aid he invokes in the exercise of his right. I have the duty of paying my debt, but I have no right to thrust the owed coppers (say) into the pocket of an unwilling creditor. The duty of taking spiritual message is performed by the messenger becoming a fit vehicle by prayer and fasting. Conceived as a right, it may easily become an imposition on unwilling parties.

Thus the manifesto, undoubtedly designed to allay suspicion and soothe the ruffled feelings of Hindus, in my opinion fails to accomplish its purpose. On the contrary it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. I venture to suggest to the authors that they need to re-examine their position in the light of my remarks. Let them recognize the fundamental difference between rights and duties. In the spiritual sphere, there is no such thing as a right.[68]

There is no right but is legal. Divorced from legality a moral right is a misnomer. And therefore you either enforce a right or fight for it. Whereas nobody asserts one's duty. He humbly performs it. I shall take an illustration. You are here. You feel like preaching to me the Gospel. I deny the right and ask you to go away. If you regard praying for me a duty, you will quietly go away and pray for me. But if you claim the right to preach to me, you will

call the police and appeal to them for preventing my obstructing you. That leads to a clash. But your duty no one dare question. You perform it here or elsewhere, and if your prayers to God to change my heart are genuine, God will change my heart. What Christianity, according to my interpretation of it, expects you to do is to pray to God to change my heart. Duty is a debt. Right belongs to a creditor and it would be a funny thing indeed if a devout Christian claimed to be a creditor.[59]

A report on so-called conversion to Christianity in Shahabad District (Bihar), drawn up by the local Harijan Sevak Sangh, is illustrative of "How They Convert." I quote it in detail:

In the district of Shahabad, about 40 years ago, a Methodist Episcopal Christian Mission was established at Arrah. Through its efforts a large number of Harijans, numbering about 3 thousand, were converted to Christianity up to the year 1931. These converts were drawn largely from the Rabidas (Chamar) community and are to be found mostly in thanas of Piro, Shahpur, Dumraon and Navanagar. Most of them embraced Christianity very soon after the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1917. This Mission has got a district officer with headquarters at Arrah and a number of subordinate officers and preachers—European and Indian, males and females—deputed to work in the interior. It has a very large establishment in about 60 acres of land at Arrah where it has got a number of permanent buildings in which they conduct boys' and girls' Middle English schools

and an industrial and technical school. It has acquired residential lands and constructed buildings of its own, in all the sub-divisional towns and also in important villages in which weekly church gatherings take place regularly.

Last year a Roman Catholic Mission appeared on the scene. Since then, the activities of both the Missions have increased. The Roman Catholic preachers first approached the former Christian (Protestant) converts and tried to take them within their fold. They have been successful in winning over many of them to their faith. They have now directed their efforts towards new conversions.

The news that appeared in the papers last month purported to relate to the new conversions in Piro and Sahar thanas. On enquiry it has been found that practically there has been no conversion in Sahar thana. But the case of Piro is different. It is the headquarters of the biggest and the most thickly populated thana of the district and the missionaries seem to have concentrated their efforts on it. Both of them have got their separate establishments here and have employed many preachers—male and female. The Roman Catholics have succeeded in bringing over many of the old Protestant converts of this thana to their denomination and are employing them to preach and propagate Christianity among the villagers. They have engaged the unemployed and literate old converts as teachers through whom their propaganda is carried on and new converts obtained. Enquiry has revealed that they have been successful in getting some new Christian converts from the Rabidas (Chamar) community amongst whom

their activities are mainly confined. Roughly their method of work may be described as follows:

After having visited the village and created familiarity with the Harijans they at once start a school and put it in charge of a Harijan teacher who either himself is an influential man or related to such a one. Whenever they come to learn that some tension or actual litigation is going on between the Harijans and other villagers they at once seize the opportunity to take up the side of the poor Harijans and help them with money and advice. They are thus hailed as saviors, and conversion follows as if to repay the obligation.

As their work is scattered throughout the thana in the remotest villages, the present enquiry could not be exhaustive. The exact number of villages affected and the total number of converts could not be accurately obtained. In thirteen villages in Thana Piro where the enquiry was held, the number of total converts would be about 600 out of whom about one-fourth are old and the rest new. Both the Missions are carrying on similar proselytizing activities in some other thanas with more or less success. A comprehensive enquiry for the collection of accurate and complete statistics seems to be urgently necessary. The one remarkable feature of these recent conversions is that they take place *en masse*. Whenever a village Harijan leader accepts the new faith almost all belonging to his clan follow him. Sometimes an influential Sardar is instrumental in converting people of his community in several villages. It would thus appear that the propaganda is threatening to become highly contagious and the number may soon rise to something quite unexpected. In all cases of conver-

sions, new or old, not a single instance can be found in which the acceptance of the new faith was due to any religious conviction. The missionary propaganda bore fruit on account of the fact that the Harijans were extremely dissatisfied with their unbearable conditions and hoped to get rid of them by the change. The reasons, therefore, of conversions may be roughly described as economic or socio-economic. Generally, the Harijans have to submit to a number of unjust exactions and to suffer from humiliating treatment which are now resented by them. Resistance not unoften leads to quarrels which sometimes reach law courts. These conditions are exploited by the missionaries. But the conversions generally have no enduring character.

Most of the old converts are still following their old religious and social customs and ceremonies unchanged. Some of them have already reverted to their old faith. Those of the new and old who are still continuing as nominal Christians are willing to return to Hinduism if their grievances are removed. Their grievances as disclosed during the enquiry are briefly indicated below:

1. They are forced to labor for their *maliks* and other Caste Hindus of their villages at about half or even less wages than they would get for the same kind of labor in other villages.

2. They are forced to labor for their *maliks* and other Caste Hindu villages on occasions of marriages and deaths in their families on almost no wages.

3. They are charged six annas per year per family as *mutharfa* (house rent).

4. They have to pay one rupee, two rupees and three rupees or four rupees for the hide of every dead cow, bullock or buffalo respectively to their owners if they fail to deliver a corresponding number of pairs of shoes to them.

5. Their wives are paid only four annas for a male or two annas for a female child born in the house of the Caste Hindu villagers where they have to work as midwives during the confinement, and even these payments are not regularly made.

6. They are forced to work for their *maliks* and Caste Hindu villagers even at the sacrifice of their own agricultural needs or when they are ill or engaged in their social or religious functions.

7. The levy of the chowkidari tax on them is generally excessive.

8. They are not allowed to draw water from wells used by Caste Hindus.

9. They are not allowed to enter temples nor are Brahmin priests available to recite religious *kathas* at their houses.

If what is said in this report about the conversions be true, it is from any standpoint reprehensible. Such superficial conversions can only give rise to suspicion and strife. But if a missionary body or individuals choose to follow the methods described in the report, nothing can be done to prevent them. It is therefore much more profitable to turn the searchlight inward and discover our own defects. Fortunately the report enables us to do so. Nine causes are enumerated to show why Harijans are induced to

leave the Hindu fold. Seven are purely economic, one is social, and one is purely religious. Thus they are reduced economically, degraded socially, and boycotted from religious participation. The wonder is not that they leave Hinduism, the wonder is that they have not done so for so long and that so few leave their ancestral faith even when they do. The moral is obvious. Let us make every discovery such as the one made in Shahabad an occasion for greater self-purification, greater dedication to the Harijan cause, greater identification with the Harijans. It should result in the local Sangh collecting more workers than it has for doing on the one hand service among the Harijans and on the other propaganda among the so-called Caste Hindus, not in the shape of reviling them but showing them that religion does not warrant the treatment that is meted out to Harijans by them.[60]

Conversion to Christianity does not solve the Harijans' problems. Although the phrase "Christian Harijans" is a misnomer, it demonstrates how the canker of untouchability has travelled beyond its limits and has contaminated other faiths also. Harijans who some time back changed their faith to escape the hardships inflicted on them by Caste Hindus have, they say, fared no better in the Christian fold. The stigma of untouchability still attaches to them. Many of them met me in Malabar and Tamil Nad and asked for redress of their wrongs. "We are in the same position," they said, "as Adi-Dravida Hindus.

Are we to have any share in this movement?" [Gandhiji's movement for the removal of untouchability.]

"Indirectly, yes," I replied.

"But we do not get any benefit at all."

"You are getting indirect benefit. The Christian missionaries are wide awake and recognize that they should do something."

"We have decided to face the oppressors boldly. We think of changing our faith."

"I cannot say anything about that. But I feel that oppression can be no reason for changing one's faith."

"We have no other go. Shall we get any relief in future from this movement?"

"Yes," I replied, "I am absolutely certain that, if this movement succeeds, untouchability in Christianity is also bound to go." [61]

In my opinion it is a travesty of religion to seek to uproot from the Harijans' simple minds such faith as they have in their ancestral religion and to transfer their allegiance to another, even though that other may be as good as and equal to the original in quality. Though all soils have the same predominant characteristics, we know that the same seeds do not fare equally well in all soils. I have some excellent tree cotton seeds which thrive excellently in certain parts of Bengal. But Miraben has not succeeded as yet in getting the same result from the same seeds in the Varoda soil. But I should be unable to subscribe to the formula, if the attempt was made to advance

it, that the Varoda soil is inferior to the Bengal soil. But my fear is that, though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbor in their breasts the belief that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they believe it is the only true religion. Without some such thing it is not possible to understand, much less to appreciate, the C.M.S. appeal from which I reproduced some revealing extracts in earlier sections of this chapter. One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism *from the very foundation and replace it by another* faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which though badly in want of repair appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy the house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation.[62]

If the leaders of different religions in India ceased to compete with one another for enticing Harijans into their fold, it would be well for this unfortunate

country. I have the profound conviction that those who are engaged in the competition are not serving the cause of religion. By looking at it in terms of politics or economics they reduce the religious values, whereas the proper thing would be to estimate politics and every other thing in terms of religion. Religion deals with the science of the soul. Great as the other forces of the world are, if there is such a thing as God, soul force is the greatest of them all. We know as a matter of fact that the greater the force the finer it is. Hitherto electricity has held the field among the finer physical powers. And yet nobody has seen it except through its wonderful results. Scientific speculation dares to talk of a finer force even than that of electricity. But no instrument devised by man has been able to know anything positive of soul force or spiritual force. It is on that force that the true religious reformer has hitherto relied and never without hope fulfilled. It is that force which will finally govern the welfare of Harijans and everyone else and confound the calculations of men however gifted they may be intellectually. The reformer who has entered upon the duty of ridding Hinduism of the disease of untouchability has to depend in everything he does on that force and nothing else.[63]

5

GANDHI'S ADVICE TO MISSIONARIES

My acquaintance with missionaries is by no means a new thing. In South Africa, where I found myself in the midst of inhospitable surroundings, I was able to make hundreds of Christian friends. I came in touch with the late Mr. Spencer Walton, Director of the South Africa General Mission, and later with the great divine, Reverend Mr. A. Murray, and several others. . . .

There was even a time in my life when a very sincere and intimate friend of mine, a great and good Quaker, had designs on me. He thought that I was too good not to become a Christian. I was sorry to have disappointed him. One missionary friend of mine in South Africa still writes to me and asks me, "How is it with you?" I have always told this friend that so far as I know it is all well with me. If it was prayer that these friends expected me to make, I was able to tell them that every day the heart-felt prayer within the closed door of my closet went to the Almighty to show me light and give me wisdom and courage to follow that light.[64]

An English friend has been at me for the past thirty

years trying to persuade me that there is nothing but damnation in Hinduism and that I must accept Christianity. When I was in jail I got, from separate sources, no less than three copies of *The Life of Sister Thérèse*, in the hope that I should follow her example and accept Jesus as the only begotten son of God and my Saviour. I read the book prayerfully but I could not accept even Saint Thérèse's testimony for myself. I must say, however, I have an open mind, if indeed at this stage and age of my life I can be said to have an open mind on this question.[85]

Though I have been a friend of missions for years, I have always been a critic, not from any desire to be critical, but because I have felt that I would be a better friend if I opened out my heart, even at the risk of wounding feelings. . . . The first distinction I would like to make, after these prefatory remarks, between Christian missionary work and mine, is that while I am strengthening the faith of the people, missions are undermining it. I have always felt that mission work will be the richer if missionaries accept as settled facts the faiths of the people they come to serve—faiths which, however crude, are valuable to them. And in order to appreciate my point of view, it becomes perhaps necessary to re-read the message of the Bible in terms of what is happening around us. The word is the same, but the spirit ever broadens intensively and extensively, and it might be that many things in the Bible will have to be re-interpreted in the light of discoveries—not of modern science—but

in the spiritual world in the shape of direct experiences common to all faiths. The fundamental verses of St. John do require to be re-read and re-interpreted. I have come to feel that like us human beings words have their evolution from stage to stage in the contents they hold. For instance the contents of the richest word—God—are not the same to every one of us. They will vary with experiences of each. They will mean one thing to the Santhal and another to his next door neighbor Rabindranath Tagore. The Sanatanist may reject my interpretation of God and Hinduism. But God Himself is a long-suffering God who puts up with any amount of abuse and misinterpretations. If we were to put the spiritual experiences together, we would find a result that would answer the cravings of human nature. Christianity is 1900 years old, Islam is 1300 years old; who knows the *possibility of either? I have not read the Vedas in the* original, but I have tried to assimilate their spirit and have not hesitated to say that, though the Vedas may be 13,000 years old—or even a million years old—as they well may be, for the word of God is as old as God Himself, even the Vedas must be interpreted in the light of our experience. The powers of God should not be limited by the limitations of our understanding. To those who have come to teach India, I therefore say, you cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experience, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this

land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the Bible.[96]

But unfortunately, missionaries come to India thinking they come to a land of heathens, of idolaters, of men who do not know God. One of the greatest of Christian divines, Bishop Heber, wrote the two lines which have always left a sting with me: "Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile." I wish he had not written them. My own experience in my travels throughout India has been to the contrary. I have gone from one end of the country to the other, without any prejudice, in a relentless search after truth, and I am not able to say that here in this fair land, watered by the great Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Jumna, man is vile. He is not vile. He is as much a seeker after truth as you and I are, possibly more so. This reminds me of a French book translated for me by a French friend. It is an account of an imaginary expedition in search of knowledge. One party landed in India and found Truth and God personified, in a little pariah's hut. I tell you there are many such huts belonging to the untouchables where you will certainly find God. They do not reason, but they persist in their belief that God is. They depend upon God for His assistance and find it too. There are many stories told throughout the length and breadth of India about these noble untouchables. Vile as some of them may be there are noblest specimens of humanity in their midst. But does my experience exhaust itself merely with the

untouchables? No, I can say that there are non-Brahmins, there are Brahmins who are as fine specimens of humanity as you will find in any place on the earth. There are Brahmins, today in India, who are embodiments of self-sacrifice, godliness and humility. There are Brahmins who are devoting themselves body and soul to the service of untouchables, with no expectation of reward from the untouchables, but with execration from orthodoxy. They do not mind it, because in serving Pariahs they are serving God. I can quote chapter and verse from my experience. I place these facts before my missionary friends in all humility for the simple reason that they may know this land better—the land which they have come to serve. The missionaries are here to find out the distress of the people of India and remove it. But I hope that they are also here in a receptive mood, and if there is anything that India has to give, they will not stop their ears, they will not close their eyes, and steel their hearts, but open up their ears, eyes and most of all their hearts to receive all that may be good in this land. I give my assurance that there is a great deal of good in India. Missionaries must not flatter themselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrated verse in St. John makes a man a Christian. If I have read the Bible correctly, I know many men who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity will, probably, if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than

many of us. I therefore ask you to approach the problem before you with open-heartedness and humility.

I recently engaged in a friendly conversation with some missionaries. I do not want to relate that conversation. But I do want to say that they were fine specimens of humanity. They did not want to misunderstand me, but I had to pass nearly one hour and a half in my attempt to explain to them that in writing what I had written I had not written anything in a spirit of ill will or hatred towards Englishmen. I was hard put to it to carry that conviction. In fact I do not know whether I carried that conviction to them at all. If salt loseth its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? If I could not drive home the truth that was in me to the three friends who certainly came with open minds, how should I fare with others? It has often occurred to me that a seeker after truth has to be silent. I know the wonderful efficacy of silence. I visited a Trappist monastery in South Africa. A beautiful place it was. Most of the inmates of that place were under a vow of silence. I enquired of the Father the motive of it, and he said that the motive was apparent. "We are frail human beings. We do not know very often what we say. If we want to listen to the still small voice that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak." I understood that precious lesson. I know the secret of silence. I do not know just now whether it would not have been wise if I had said nothing to those friends beyond saying, "We shall know each

other better when the mists have rolled away." Just now I feel humiliated. Why did I argue with these friends? But I say these things, first of all to make this confession, and secondly to state that if missionaries refuse to see the other side, if they refuse to understand what India is thinking, then they deny themselves the real privilege of service. I have told my missionary friends, "Noble as you are, you have isolated yourselves from the people you want to serve." I cannot help recalling the conversation I related in Darjeeling at the missionary Language School. Lord Salisbury was waited upon by a deputation of missionaries in connection with China and this deputation wanted protection. I cannot recall the exact words but give the purport of the answer Lord Salisbury gave. He said, "Gentlemen, if you want to go to China to preach the message of Christianity, then do not ask for the assistance of the temporal power. Go with your lives in your hands and, if the people of China want to kill you, imagine that you have been killed in the service of God." Lord Salisbury was right. Christian missionaries come to India under the shadow, or, if you like, under the protection of a temporal power, and it creates an impassable bar.

If you give me statistics that so many orphans have been reclaimed and brought to the Christian faith, I would accept them but I do not feel convinced thereby that it is the Christian mission. In my opinion the missionary purpose is infinitely superior to that. You want to find men in India and, if you want to

do that, you will have to go to the lowly cottages, not to give them something but perhaps to take something from them. . . . I miss receptiveness, humility, and willingness on the part of the missionaries to identify themselves with the masses of India.[97]

By taking the position that he is going to *give* his spiritual goods, the missionary labels himself as belonging to a different and higher species, which makes him inaccessible to others. There certainly is plenty of good work for American missionaries to do in America. They are not a superfluity there. If it was not for the curious position that their Church has taken, they would not be here. The missionary cannot claim infallibility. He assumes knowledge of all people, which he could do only if he were God. Missionaries in India are laboring under a double fallacy: That what they think best for another person is really so; and that what they regard as the best for themselves is the best for the whole world. I am pleading for a little humility.[98]

Missionaries should alter their attitude. Today they tell people that there is no salvation for them except through the Bible and through Christianity. It is customary to decry other religions and to offer their own as the only one that can bring deliverance. That attitude should be radically changed. Let them appear before the people as they are, and try to rejoice in seeing Hindus become better Hindus and Mussalmans better Mussalmans. Let them start work at the bottom, let them enter into what is best in their life

and offer nothing inconsistent with it. That will make their work far more efficacious, and what they will say and offer to the people will be appreciated without suspicion and hostility. In a word, let them go to the people not as patrons, but as one of them, and not to oblige them but to serve them and to work among them.[69]

To the missionary I would say: Just forget that you have come to a country of heathens, and think that they are as much in search of God as you are; just feel that you are not attempting to give your spiritual goods to the people, but share your worldly goods, of which you have a good stock. You will then do your work without a mental reservation and thereby you will share your spiritual treasures. . . .[70] It is not wrong that a Christian missionary should rely on his own experience, but [wrong] that he should dispute the evidence of a Hindu devotee's life. Just as he has his spiritual experience and the joy of communion, even so has a Hindu.[71]

Christian missionaries quite unconsciously do harm to themselves and so to us. It is perhaps impertinent for me to say that they do harm to themselves, but quite pertinent to say that they do harm to us. They do harm to those amongst whom they work and those amongst whom they do not work, *i.e.*, the harm is done to the whole of India. They present a Christianity of their belief but not the message of Jesus as I understand it. The more I study their activities the more sorry I become. There is such a gross misun-

derstanding of religion on the part of those who are intelligent, very far advanced, and whose motives need not be questioned. It is a tragedy that such a thing should happen in the human family.[72]

Missionaries should cease to think that they must convert the whole world to their interpretation of Christianity. At the end of reading the Bible, let me tell you, it did not leave on my mind the impression that Jesus ever meant Christians to do what the bulk of those who take his name do. The moment you give up the attitude of religious imperialism the field of service becomes limitless. You limit your own capacity by thinking and saying that you must proselytize. Let Christian missionaries literally follow the words of Jesus—"Not he that sayeth 'Lord, Lord,' but he that doeth His will. . . ."[73] That brings me to the duty of tolerance. If you cannot feel that the other faith is as true as yours, you should feel at least that the men are as true as you.[74]

I want missionaries to complement the faith of the people instead of undermining it. As the Dewan of Mysore said in his address to the Assembly, the Adi Karnatakas should be made better Hindus, as they belong to Hinduism. I would similarly say to you make us better Hindus, *i.e.*, better men or women. Why should a man, even if he becomes a Christian, be torn from his surroundings? Whilst a boy I heard it being said that to become a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. Things are better now, but it is not unusual to find

Christianity synonymous with denationalization and Europeanization. Must we give up our simplicity to become better people? Do not lay the axe at our simplicity.[75]

The teaching of Jesus should not be confused with what passes for modern civilization. It is no part of the missionary call to tear the life of the people of the East by its roots. Tolerate whatever is good in that life and do not hastily, with preconceived notions, judge it. In spite of your belief in the greatness of Western civilization and in spite of your pride in all your achievements, I plead with you for humility, and ask you to leave some little room for doubt in which, as Tennyson sang, there was more truth, though by "doubt" he no doubt meant a different thing. Let each one live his life, and if ours is the right life, where is the cause for hurry? It will react of itself.[76]

A time is coming when those who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants, vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retrace their steps and say, "What have we done?" Civilizations have come and gone, and in spite of all our vaunted progress I am tempted to ask again and again, "To what purpose?" . . . Let us by all means drink deep of the fountains that are given to us in the Sermon on the Mount, but then we shall have to take to sackcloth and ashes. The teaching of the Sermon was meant for each and

every one of us. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.[77]

The ability of missionaries is unquestioned. All of these abilities can be used for the service of India, and India will appreciate them. But that can only happen if there are no mental reservations. If you come to give education, you must give it after the Indian pattern. You should sympathetically study our institutions and suggest changes. But you come with preconceived notions and seek to destroy. If people from the West came on Indian terms, they would supply a felt want. When Americans come and ask me what service they can render, I tell them: If you dangle your millions before us, you will make beggars of us and demoralize us. But in one thing I do not mind being a beggar. I would beg of you your scientific talent. You can ask your engineers and agricultural experts to place their services at our disposal. They must not come to us as our lords and masters but as volunteer workers. . . . A Mysore engineer (who is a Pole) has sent me a box of hand-made tools made to suit village requirements. Supposing an engineer of that character comes and studies our tools and our cottage machines and suggests improvements in them, he would be of great service. If you do this kind of work in a religious spirit, you will have delivered the message of Jesus.[78]

Service, which has not the slightest touch of self in it, is itself the highest religion. . . .[79] Conversion and service go ill together.[80] My complaint with my

missionary friends is that they do not bring to bear on their work a purely humanitarian spirit. Their object is to add more members to their fold. . . . Some of the friends of a Mission were the other day in high glee over the conversion to Christianity of a learned pandit. They have been dear friends, and so I told them that it was hardly proper to go into ecstasics over a man forsaking his religion. Today it is the case of a learned Hindu, tomorrow it may be that of an ignorant villager not knowing the principles of his religion. . . . Certainly I would feel no joy if a Christian should embrace Hinduism. Here is Miraben. I would have her find all the spiritual comfort she needs from Christianity, and I should not dream of converting her to Hinduism, even if she wanted to do so. Today it is the case of a grown-up woman like her, tomorrow it may be that of a European child trusted to my care by a friend. Take the case of Khan Saheb's daughter entrusted to my care by her father. I should jealously educate her in her own faith and should strive my utmost against her being lured away from it, if ever she was so inclined. I have had the privilege of having children and grown-up persons of other faiths with me. I was thankful to find them better Christians, Mussalmans, Parsis or Jews by their contact with me. . . . Let my missionary friends remember that it was none but that most Christlike of all Christians, Albert Schweitzer, who gave Christianity a unique interpretation when he himself resolved "not to preach any more,

not to lecture any more," but to bury himself in Equatorial Africa simply with a view to fulfill somewhat the debt that Europe owes to Africa.[81]

Let us consider the matter of missionary hospitals in this connection. When missionaries give medical help they expect a reward in the shape of some of their patients becoming Christians. At the back of their minds is not pure service for its sake, but the result of service in the shape of many people coming to the Christian fold. . . . The kink is in the Church thinking that there are people in whom certain things are lacking, and that you must supply them whether they want them or not. If you simply say to your patients, "You have taken the medicine I gave you. Thank God, He has healed you. Don't come again," you have done your duty. But if you also say, "How nice it would be if you had the same faith in Christianity as I have," you do not make of your medicine a free gift. . . . The way out of the difficulty, as I see it, is for you to feel that what you possess, your patient also can possess, but through a different route. . . . Because you adore your mother, you cannot wish that all other children were your mother's children. That would be a physical impossibility. In like manner, your position is a spiritual impossibility. God has the whole of humanity as his children. How can I limit His grace by my little mind and say that mine is the only way?[82]

That which is true of the medical work of Christian missions is also true of the educational and so-

cial work. These activities are undertaken, not for their own sake, but as an aid to the salvation of those who receive such service. The history of India would have been written differently if the Christians had come to India to live their lives in our midst and permeate ours with their aroma, if there was any. There would then have been mutual good will and utter absence of suspicion. "But," say some of you, "if what you say had held good with Jesus, there would have been no Christians." To answer this would land me in a controversy in which I have no desire to engage. But I may be permitted to say that Jesus preached not a new religion but a new life. He called men to repentance. It was he who said, "Not every one that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." [83]

Much good work is being done by missions, but give up that which makes you objects of suspicion and demoralizes us also. We go to your hospitals with the mercenary motive of having an operation performed, but with no object of responding to what is at the back of your mind, even as our children do when they go to Bible classes in their colleges and then laugh at what they read there. I tell you our conversation at home about these missionary colleges is not at all edifying. Why then spoil your good work with other motives? [84]

I am convinced that the American and British money which has been voted for Missionary Socie-

ties has done more harm than good. You cannot serve God and Mammon both. And my fear is that Mammon has been sent to serve India and God has remained behind, with the result that He will one day have His vengeance.[86]

I would say to Christian leaders that there should be less of theology and more of truth in all that you say and do. . . . Amongst agents of the many untruths that are propounded in the world one of the foremost is theology. I do not say there is no demand for it. There is a demand in the world for many a questionable thing. But even those who have to do with theology as part of their work have to survive their theology. I have two good Christian friends who gave up theology and decided to live the gospel of Christ. I have profited from my study of Jesus, but not, let me tell you, through theology or through the ordinary interpretation of theologists.[86]

There is a proper evangelization. When you feel that you have received peace from your particular interpretation of the Bible, you share it with others. But you do not need to give vocal expression to it. Your whole life is more eloquent than your lips. Language is always an obstacle to the full expression of thought. How, for instance, will you tell a man to read the Bible as you read it, how by word of mouth will you transfer to him the light as you receive it from day to day and moment to moment? Therefore all religions say: "Your life is your speech."

If you are humble enough, you will say you cannot adequately represent your religion by speech or pen. . . . Language is a limitation of the truth which can only be represented by life.

Life is its own expression. I take the simile of the rose I used years ago. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all around, or on the beauty which everyone who has eyes can see. Well, spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond. There are passages in the Bible, the *Gita*, the *Bhagawat*, the Quran, which eloquently show this. "Wherever," we read, "Krishna appeared, people acted like those possessed." The same thing about Jesus. But to come nearer home, why are people touched as if by magic wherever Jawaharlal goes? They sometimes do not even know he has come, and yet they take sudden fire from the very thought that he is coming. Now there it may not be described as a spiritual influence, but there is a subtle influence and it is unquestionably there, call it by what name you like. They do not want to hear him, they simply want to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way. Spiritual life has greater potency than Marconi waves. When there is no medium between me and my Lord, and I simply become a willing vessel for His influences to flow into it, then I overflow as the

water of the Ganges at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the truth. Truth is most economical of words. There is thus no truer or other evangelism than life.[87]

I should like to see all men, not only in India but in the world, belonging to different faiths, become better people by contact with one another and, if that happens, the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration, and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, *i.e.*, to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant with its religions working side by side with one another.[88]

Tolerance does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.[89]

NOTES

1. Indian Edition of Gandhi's *Christian Missions, Their Place in India*, pp. 7–10. (Hereafter this volume will be referred to as *IE*.)

The pages are an extract from *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Part I, Chapter X. (Hereafter the original source will follow immediately the quotation from *IE*.)

2. *IE*, p. 50; *Young India*, Aug. 6, 1925.

3. *IE*, pp. 15–17; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. I, Chap. XX.

4. *IE*, pp. 19–22; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. II, Chap. XI.

5. *IE*, pp. 23–26; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. II, Chap. XV.

6. *IE*, pp. 27–29; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. II, Chap. XXII.

7. *IE*, p. 51; *Young India*, Aug. 6, 1925.

8. *IE*, pp. 13–14; *Young India*, Mar. 4, 1926.

9. *IE*, pp. 7–9; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. I, Chap. X.

10. *IE*, pp. 15–16; *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Pt. I, Chap. XX.

11. *IE*, pp. 4–5; *From Yeravda Mandir*, Chaps. X and XI.

12. *IE*, p. 206; *Harijan*, Nov. 28, 1936.

13. *IE*, pp. 5–6; *From Yeravda Mandir*, Chaps. X and XI.

14. *IE*, p. 186; *Young India*, Dec. 22, 1927.

15. *IE*, p. 34; *Young India*, Sept. 25, 1925.

16. *IE*, p. 122; *Young India*, Aug. 20, 1925.

17. *IE*, p. 170; *Harijan*, Mar. 6, 1937.

18. *IE*, p. 126; *Harijan*, Jan. 30, 1937.

19. *IE*, p. 3; *From Yeravda Mandir*, Chaps. X and XI.

20. *IE*, pp. 213–14; *Harijan*, Dec. 5, 1936.
21. *IE*, pp. 32–33; *Young India*, Sept. 25, 1925.
22. *IE*, pp. 179–80; *Young India*, Dec. 8, 1927.
23. *IE*, pp. 279–80; *Harijan*, Mar. 23, 1940.
24. *IE*, p. 149; *Harijan*, May 25, 1935.
25. *IE*, p. 33; *Young India*, Sept. 25, 1925.
26. *IE*, p. 167; *Harijan*, Jan. 16, 1937.
27. *IE*, p. 170; *Harijan*, Mar. 6, 1937.
28. *IE*, p. 48; *Young India*, Sept. 2, 1926.
29. *IE*, pp. 171–72; *Harijan*, Mar. 6, 1937.
30. *IE*, pp. 228–29; *Harijan*, Apr. 17, 1937.
31. *IE*, pp. 51–52; *Young India*, Aug. 6, 1925.
32. *IE*, pp. 48–49; *Young India*, Sept. 2, 1926.
33. *IE*, pp. 33–34; *Young India*, Sept. 25, 1925.
34. *IE*, pp. 42–44; *Young India*, May 29, 1924.
35. *IE*, p. 46; *Harijan*, Aug. 8, 1936.
36. *IE*, pp. 164–65; *Harijan*, May 11, 1935.
37. *IE*, pp. 226–27; *Harijan*, Apr. 17, 1937.
38. *IE*, p. 298; *Harijan*, Feb. 25, 1939.
39. *IE*, p. 227; *Harijan*, Apr. 17, 1937.
40. *IE*, p. 83; *Harijan*, Mar. 21, 1936.
41. *IE*, pp. 138–39; *Harijan*, Sept. 25, 1937.
42. *IE*, p. 292; *Harijan*, Jan. 13, 1940.
43. *IE*, p. 126; *Harijan*, Jan. 30, 1937.
44. *IE*, p. 165; *Harijan*, May 11, 1935.
45. *IE*, p. 210; *Harijan*, Nov. 28, 1936.
46. *IE*, pp. 191–92; *Young India*, Jan. 19, 1928.
47. *IE*, p. 78; *Harijan*, Sept. 28, 1935.
48. *IE*, pp. 70–71; *Harijan*, Feb. 16, 1934.
49. *IE*, p. 236; *Harijan*, Dec. 19, 1936.
50. *IE*, pp. 81–82; *Harijan*, Oct. 19, 1935.
51. *IE*, pp. 83–85; *Harijan*, Mar. 21, 1936.
52. *IE*, pp. 86–87; *Harijan*, June 20, 1936.
53. *IE*, pp. 88–89; *Harijan*, Aug. 22, 1936.
54. *IE*, pp. 207–8; *Harijan*, Nov. 28, 1936.

55. *IE*, p. 238; *Harijan*, Dec. 19, 1936.
56. *IE*, pp. 92–94; *Harijan*, Dec. 19, 1936.
57. *IE*, pp. 95–97; *Harijan*, Dec. 26, 1936.
58. *IE*, pp. 129–37; *Harijan*, Apr. 3, 1937.
59. *IE*, pp. 224–25; *Harijan*, Apr. 17, 1937.
60. *IE*, pp. 108–12; *Harijan*, June 19, 1937.
61. *IE*, p. 301; *Harijan*, Feb. 23, 1934.
62. *IE*, pp. 100–101; *Harijan*, Mar. 13, 1937.
63. *IE*, pp. 89–90; *Harijan*, Aug. 22, 1936.
64. *IE*, p. 50; *Young India*, Aug. 6, 1925.
65. *IE*, pp. 151–52; *Harijan*, May 30, 1936.
66. *IE*, pp. 158–59; *Young India*, Aug. 11, 1927.
67. *IE*, pp. 53–56; *Young India*, Aug. 6, 1925.
68. *IE*, pp. 204–5; *Harijan*, July 18, 1936.
69. *IE*, pp. 154–55; *Young India*, July 14, 1927.
70. *IE*, pp. 203–4; *Harijan*, July 18, 1936.
71. *IE*, p. 200; *Harijan*, July 18, 1936.
72. *IE*, p. 215; *Harijan*, Dec. 12, 1936.
73. *IE*, pp. 278–79; *Harijan*, Mar. 23, 1940.
74. *IE*, p. 162; *Young India*, Aug. 11, 1927.
75. *IE*, p. 160; *Young India*, Aug. 11, 1927.
76. *IE*, p. 181; *Young India*, Dec. 8, 1927.
77. *IE*, p. 182; *Young India*, Dec. 8, 1927.
78. *IE*, pp. 215–16; *Harijan*, Dec. 12, 1936.
79. *IE*, p. 149; *Harijan*, May 25, 1935.
80. *IE*, p. 192; *Young India*, Jan. 19, 1928.
81. *IE*, pp. 196–97; *Harijan*, Jan. 25, 1935.
82. *IE*, pp. 201–2; *Harijan*, July 18, 1936.
83. *IE*, p. 114; *Harijan*, June 12, 1937.
84. *IE*, p. 212; *Harijan*, Dec. 5, 1936.
85. *IE*, p. 245; *Harijan*, Dec. 26, 1936.
86. *IE*, pp. 277–78; *Harijan*, Mar. 23, 1940.
87. *IE*, pp. 217–18; *Harijan*, Dec. 12, 1936.
88. *IE*, p. 186; *Young India*, Dec. 22, 1927.
89. *IE*, p. 4; *From Yeravda Mandir*, Chaps. X and XI.

GLOSSARY

ADI-DRAVIDAS. Outcastes.

ADI-KARNATAKAS. Canarese-speaking outcaste groups.

AGAKHANI. Referring to the sect of Ismailians, known in India as the Khojahs and headed by the Aga Khan.

AHIMSA. Love; non-violence.

ANNA. Sixteenth part of a rupee—an Indian monetary unit.

ARYA SAMAJ. A reform movement within Hinduism, emphasizing early Aryan beliefs and practices.

AVATAR. The incarnation of a deity, especially applied to the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

BHAGAVAT. The Bhagavat Gita, the "Song of the Adorable." Recounts the adventures of Vishnu, incarnated in Krishna. Often called the New Testament of Hinduism.

BHAJAN. A hymn.

BHAJANAVALI. Repertoire of hymns.

BILVA LEAVES. Leaves of the bel-tree, used in the worship of Shiva.

BRAHMIN. A member of the priestly class at the top of the traditional Hindu social system.

CHAITANYA. Founder of a new sect within Hinduism which worships Krishna and Radha.

CHOWKIDARI. The *chowkidari* tax is a police tax.

DEPRESSED CLASSES. Those at the bottom of the traditional Hindu social system; Outcastes; Harijans.

DEWAN. Prime Minister of an Indian State.

DHARMA VICHAR. Thoughts on Religion.

EKADASHI. Eleventh day of the waxing or waning moon.

EZHAVA. A superior type of low-caste people in South India.

GITA. See *Bhagavat* above.

GRANTH SAHEB. The Sikh Holy Book.

HARIJAN. A term applied by Gandhi to the Untouchables. Originally means "the people of God."

HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH. A society founded for service to the Harijans.

HAVELI. The Vaishnava temple.

HORMAZD. In the Zoroastrian creed, Hormazd is the Good Principle, perpetually in conflict with Ahriman, the Evil Principle.

ISLAM. The religion of the Mahomedans.

JAIN. Jains are followers of Mahavira, who founded a sect closely resembling Buddhism.

JAWAHARLAL. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

KATHAS. A religious recitation.

KHAN SAHEB. Abdul Gaffur Khan, the Muslim Nationalist leader, popularly called "The Frontier Gandhi."

KHOJA. One of the Ismailian sects in India, headed by the Aga Khan.

KORAN. The Mahomedan sacred scriptures.

KRISHNA. Hindu deity worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu.

MAHADEVA. Literally, The Great God.

MAHARAJA. The ruler of an Indian State.

MALIK. Master, proprietor.

MANIRATNAMALA. (Garland of Jewels), name of a popular Hindu philosophical treatise ascribed to Shankaracharya.

MIRABEN. Miss Madelaine Slade, an English disciple of Gandhiji.

MUNUKSHU PRAKARAN OF YOGAVASISHTHA. A philosophical treatise which is the work of some unknown but celebrated Hindu sage, dealing with the way to obtain final happiness.

MUSSALMAN. Muslim; a follower of the Prophet Mohammed.

PANCHIKARAN. (The Five Elements), a philosophical work by Sureshwar, a pupil of Shankaracharya.

PARIAH. An outcaste.

PARSI. Indian adherent of Zoroastrianism.

QURAN. *See* Koran.

RABIDAS (*Chamar*). An outcaste group, mostly leather workers.

RAMA. One of the most celebrated incarnations of the Hindu deity Vishnu.

RAMA RAKSHA. May Rama (God) protect you.

RAMANAMA. Reciting the name of Rama (God).

RAMAYANA. Name of the great epic poem recording the exploits of Rama. The *Ramayana* is of great religious significance in India.

RAMZAN. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, during which a strict fast is observed from dawn to sunset.

RUPEE. Indian monetary unit.

SANATANI. Orthodox Hindu.

SANTHAL. Backward, aboriginal people of Bihar and Orissa.

SARDAR. A leading government official, either civil or military.

SAVARNA. Caste Hindus.

SHADDARSHANA SAMUCHCHAYA. "The Six Hindu Systems," by a sage by the name of Hari.

SHETH. Name given to a Hindu or Jain merchant.

SHIVA. The third major God of the Hindu triad: Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; Shiva, the Destroyer.

SHUDDHI. Literally, purification; Hindu reconversion movement.

SIKH. A member of a religious sect founded by Guru Nanak, which reflects both Hindu and Muslim religious elements.

TABLIGH. The Mahomedan conversion movement.

TAMIL NAD. The area of South India in which Tamil is spoken.

TELEGU. The section of India, largely in the Madras Province, where Telegu is spoken.

THANA. Circle attached to a military or police station.

TULASI BEADS. Tulasi wood is revered by the Vishnuites. The Vishnuite rosary is made of lotus seeds or tulasi wood in 108 pieces.

UNTOUCHABILITY. The theory that those at the bottom of the Hindu social system—the outcastes—are so foul as to be unfit for ordinary human intercourse.

UPANISHADS. Important literary productions of Vedic India, attempting to solve problems connected with the universe and the nature and destiny of man.

VAISHNAVA. Worshipper of Vishnu.

VEDAS. Revealed sacred books of the Hindus.

YERAVDA PACT. An agreement by which the Depressed Classes, while retaining their separate seats, should also vote with the general Hindu electorate.

YOGIC PRACTICES. Practice of breath control, etc., said to give supernatural powers.

ZEND AVESTA. The Zoroastrian Scriptures.